

Disclaimer: NOT Blonde, Not rich, not living in Britain, initials are not JKR therefore don't own. Love the characters and the setting so am just playing, I get nothing but the reviews my readers give me.

A/N: Happy New Year! This fiction like many of my others is co authored with Darkshadowedrose. Many characters will be OOC from the books. Harry will be grey and Slytherin. I hope to stay mostly true to the Dumbledore of the books. But with a different Harry it might be hard. There will be no pairings before sixth year at the earliest so don't ask. Petunia is a bit of major player in this story especially at first and very OOC from the books. I hope you all like. Postings will be once a week on Sundays. Enjoy!

Trust is a Relative Thing

Chapter 1 A Boy on a Doorstep

The morning of November second 1981 stood out in the mind of Petunia Dursley for one reason it was the day that Albus Dumbledore ruined her life. She had been forced to re-plan her life three times before but being forced to do so never made her happy.

As a child Petunia had planned that she would grow up to be a prima ballerina and that she and her three years younger sister would grow up and marry lords and be rich. That plan hadn't worked so well. They were born into a lower middle class family and, well, ballet and lords didn't abound in their neighborhood. Then when Lily was eleven and Petunia fourteen she got a mysterious letter and everything changed. That creepy little boy from Spinner's End proved to be correct, Lily was a witch. Albus Dumbledore took her sister from her. There was one benefit however, her parents had finally thought her old enough that she was allowed to take a bus to the far side of town and take ballet with a woman who had danced for the Royal Ballet and to pay for it she was allowed to go to high school in a public school instead of parochial school. At high school Petunia found out that her dreams of being one of the beautiful people in this world weren't going to come true. Her bone structure could never take her from the description of somewhat stately and handsome if she worked at it, into the realm of the truly beautiful. But one thing Petunia did have was brains. She quickly learned that by being a tutor she could earn money of her own and get in with the crowd of people that she wished to associate with. Then she finally hit her teenage growth spurt. And grew and grew, when she finally

finished growing she was 5' 11 ½" her dreams of prima ballerina were gone. Petunia polished her manners and despaired about her looks.

Then she met Vernon Dursley. Vernon was a Rugby Player. He was from a solidly middle class family and he had potential. He wasn't the sort of handsome that would make him a target of the prettier girls nor was he very bright, but he was trainable. She tutored him to get his grades high enough that he could get into college on a rugby scholarship. She also got an academic scholarship to the same college. She figured out that Vernon had a talent to listen and be persuasive, she helped him choose a marketing and business degree and tutored him all through college. Vernon had proposed calling her the willowy queen of his heart, after winning the rugby championship their second year of college. She accepted and they had a Christmas wedding their third year. A wedding that was nearly ruined by the wizard that her sister was engaged to. Lily had fixed things but Petunia still wanted to kill that annoying man who claimed he was only trying to have some fun. Vernon had been shocked that this strange young man, who was supposed to become a member of his extended family, would be so immature and crass at his wedding. On their brief honeymoon to Paris they agreed to have as little to do with Petunia's sister and her soon to be husband as humanly possible. Vernon graduated with his marketing degree and got a sales job at Grunnings Drill Co. Petunia graduated and found out just how useless a design degree could be when one didn't have connections and so started back to school to get a teaching credential.

Then she got pregnant. When she was five months along, her and Lily's parents died in a strange automobile accident. Her plans of a large close family were destroyed. Her parents dead, her sister married to, well he may have been a lord but he was also a freak, and her sister in law was a lush living off the inheritance that by rights should have been split between Vernon and Marge. Vernon, with his soft spot for his sister, instead let her keep it all claiming that since he had his queen and was capable of providing for himself he would do as his parents would have wanted and given it to his sister. Hardly the sort of family that would help them in their quest to move up the ladder of social success.

Petunia and Vernon were saddened by the loss of their only decent relatives, but were pleased that Petunia's parents had left her the

house and Lilly the life insurance money because it helped them trim their expenses and save more. The only drawback was it was an hour commute from Grunnings, longer if traffic was bad. Dudley was born and they had a year and a half of bliss.

Then the morning of November 2, 1981 Petunia stepped out to get the milk and found a baby and a letter. A letter that read:

To Petunia Dursley,

I regret to inform you that late Halloween night your sister and her husband were killed, by an evil wizard. Your sister died protecting her son, because of this she invoked a very rare but very powerful protective magic. Your nephew is the subject of a prophecy, and he has temporarily banished the evil wizard. However the evil wizard has many followers and I'm afraid the boy's godfather is under suspicion of having something to do with the deaths of the boy's parents. In the interests of prolonging the protection from his mother, and in protecting him from the backlash these events are sure to cause, I have brought him to you to be raised and cared for. The wards I have placed about your home will protect both him and your family from any in the magical world who wish to find and possibly harm you. I know that you were hurt when I didn't allow you to come to Hogwarts with Lily, Petunia, but for the sake of the love you have for your sister please take her son into your home and raise him as if he was your own. I will be in touch. My condolences on your loss. Sincerely,

Albus Dumbledore

P.S. It's important that you never leave the wards for longer than two weeks. One more request don't tell Harry about the magical world until he is older. It would come with far too many burdens for such a young child.

It was hard suddenly having two babies in the house, Petunia was thankful that at least Harry was smaller than Dudley because it meant they only had to buy a crib, nappies and food. As it was, the sudden increase in their expenses was unwelcome. Harry frightened her several times early on because he had a fear of open spaces and liked to hide in the cupboard under the stairs. He was in general an easy going child, he didn't get angry and cry if Dudley took a toy he was playing with and despite being younger and smaller he was

very steady on his feet which meant she seldom had to carry him. He was only difficult at night, being prone to night terrors as well as nightmares. Vernon resented the frequent disturbances during the night but agreed Harry was only a baby. He ignored Harry's presence as much as possible. Petunia kept quiet about the times when Harry used accidental magic to entertain Dudley and himself during the day. Things went on smoothly until one morning when Harry was impatient for his turn in the high chair. He summoned the food from Petunia's hand to the floor where he was sitting, and accidentally broke the dish. Vernon on seeing this scooped the boy from the floor and smacked his bottom five times. Harry wailing, retreated to the cupboard under the stairs. But Petunia always wondered how much of the conversation that followed Harry had heard and understood. Petunia's shock at Vernon's actions lasted until Harry had left the room.

"Vernon Dursley how dare you!"

"Pet. I won't have that freakish boy using it, to take Dudley's food and destroying things we've worked hard to pay for. From now on if he uses it, I say we punish him."

"I don't like him using it either, but he can't help it and he's a child. I'm sure he was just hungry and impatient. Breaking the dish was an accident, but it happens. Dudley has broken dishes too."

"The boy is a burden!"

"The boy is our nephew!"

"Control him or I will. I resent every penny we pay providing that freak with food and nappies. He could at least help you around here instead of taking advantage of us."

"He's only two and a half years old."

"We never asked for him, hell those bloody freaks left him on our doorstep because they didn't want the burden of caring for him either. I say again, control him Pet or I will."

After that day Harry always waited his turn and he did his best to be helpful to Petunia. He started toilet training a week later and mastered it within a month. She taught him how to dust low shelves

for her and he helped put groceries away in the low cabinets and unloaded the silverware from the dishwasher. He also helped her sort and fold laundry.

When Harry was three things had mostly settled down. Although Harry still had bad dreams they were no longer a nightly occurrence. Vernon got a promotion to general sales manager and they had decided it was time to move to a larger home and to try for another baby. Petunia had managed to break Dudley of his habits of hitting everyone while trying and get his own way and of destroying everything he touched. But she couldn't get him to be considerate of Harry. She suspected it had more to do with the disdain Vernon held Harry in than anything else, and the fact it quietly pleased Vernon when Dudley was unkind to the smaller dark haired boy.

Everything was packed and they were waiting for the movers when there was a knock on the door. When they opened it, there stood an old man with a long ponytail and a longer beard, that was wearing a purple suit. "Hello Petunia, Vernon, boys."

Dudley said, "Are you the mover?"

"No I'm afraid not. In fact the movers aren't coming. I've had to cancel those arrangements."

"By what right! Who are you to say we can't move!" Vernon blustered.

The old man waved a stick. And Vernon seemed frozen. He waved it a little more then Vernon floated over to the sofa. "Petunia, I'm afraid you can't move away from Privet Drive. This is where the wards protecting Harry are; you move away from here and you move him and the rest of you into danger."

"But the contract on the new house, the-"

"I've canceled those as well, here is the earnest money back. The memories of you, all have been removed from all parties. No, no, it was no trouble. After all the most important thing is that you all stay safe."

"But we want to move, Vernon got a promotion. We need a larger house that is closer so we can entertain appropriately-"

"Petunia, I'm very sorry but for Harry to stay safe, you all have to stay here. It's only until he's seventeen."

"You! You're Albus Dumbledore!"

"That's right and you're doing marvelous at raising Harry." He waved his wand a few more times and then got back to his feet pointed his wand at Vernon and said obli-viate then did the same to Dudley. "You've done a marvelous job packing your belongings so you can now repaint the house."

"What have you done to my husband?" Petunia snarled at the old man.

"I've given him a reason for having packed the house up. And I've set a mild compulsion spell into the ward structure so he will no longer desire to move. Good day, Petunia." He said with a smile before exiting the back door and after looking around to ensure no one was watching he disappeared.

Petunia almost cried as Vernon and Dudley insisted that they go shopping and refurbish Privet Drive. That evening Vernon said to her "Pet, I've been thinking. The boy still likes the cupboard under the stairs what if we cleaned it out, put what's there out in the shed, and made that his room. We could use the mattress from his crib, give him some hooks for his clothes. That way the smallest bedroom would be free to be a nursery."

A year later they were still trying for the baby they all wanted. The fertility specialists they had consulted couldn't find a thing wrong with either her or Vernon, and she was left wondering why they couldn't get pregnant. They had gotten Dudley despite birth control. Harry had been moved to the cupboard but was happy enough with the change. Additionally his night terrors had all but disappeared with the move. Harry now helped even more around the house and aside from an incident when he turned the preschool substitute teacher's wig blue there hadn't been much magic.

Vernon had had an angina attack and Petunia used it as an excuse to feed the whole family a much healthier diet and enforce an exercise regime on both Dudley and Vernon. Sweet talking Vernon, "I couldn't possibly be happy if anything happened to you and don't

you want to see our fine strong son grow up? Besides if you exercise more you could maintain your handsome physique. I know I would love that and don't I take care of myself for you?" Wrapped around Petunia's finger Vernon had of course agreed.

In April of 1984, things changed. Harry had been completely focused on his painting at preschool when the teacher and Dudley and two other boys interrupted his attention and spoiled his painting and he got angry. A moment later they were stuck to the ceiling. The assistant teacher frantically called Petunia.

Elsewhere alarms were going off at the Ministry of Magic. The Accidental Magic Reversal Squad came along with Albus Dumbledore. Many things happened. The magic Harry did was reversed and the memories of those involved, but not Petunia, were modified. Albus decided that Harry's magic was strong enough to be a problem, so without even asking Petunia's permission he placed a binding on Harry's magic that would slowly disintegrate when he was ten so he would be able to access his magic when he was eleven and heading to Hogwarts.

"How are things going Petunia?" Albus Dumbledore asked.

"Mrs. Dursley, if you please. Life here at Privet Drive is rubbing along acceptably, it would be better if Vernon and I weren't experiencing difficulties getting pregnant."

The old man's blue eyes twinkled even as his voice took on an apologetic note. "I'm sorry I must have forgotten to mention the wards have a side effect. You will be unable to have more children until after the wards fall when Harry is seventeen. It's probably just as well, this way you have plenty of resources for Harry and Donnie is it?"

Petunia was stunned silent.

"Good day Petunia." He said then apparated away. Harry standing beside her, somehow knew that what the old man said was very bad and that it somehow related to him. He knew he was supposed to not remember but somehow he had blocked it, before the strange old man made him feels so strange and kind of sick.

The months that followed were the worst of Harry's life. When his uncle was told of Harry's escapade with magic that day he was spanked and locked in his cupboard without supper for the first time. His aunt let him out to use the bathroom at bedtime but otherwise didn't acknowledge him in any way. The next morning his uncle let him out and said, "Your freakishness has cost this family a lot, boy. So you'd better start to contribute more to this household and lighten the burden on your aunt, understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh and after what you did at pre-school yesterday no more pre-school for you. Bad enough we have to move Dudley to a new school. Learn to control it boy, and we'll let you go to school next year. Got it?"

Terrified because he was sure he couldn't learn to control the strange things that happened around him, Harry gave the only answer he knew would satisfy his uncle "Yes, sir."

Petunia went numb and ignored her nephew, and the unkind things her husband and son did to him for months until Harry's fifth birthday. On that day, Dudley pushed him down the stairs and put Harry in the hospital. Once she was reassured that Harry wasn't in any danger, she came home and gave Dudley the first and what she hoped would be the last spanking she ever had to give him. She told Dudley that as long as Harry was recovering he would have to do everything around the house to help that Harry did and sleep in Harry's room, because Harry would need the space of his room while he recovered. Also that he was grounded and would have no TV, no computer and no toys. Vernon tried to protest but Petunia shut him up by saying, "I saw him deliberately push Harry down the stairs Vernon. I may not like the boy, but I will not allow our son to get away with attempting to murder his own cousin! Do you want Dudley to be the sort of person who grows up and gets sent to prison?"

"Of course not!"

"Then let me discipline him!"

Vernon left it to her, he loved his wife. She was far more intelligent than he, and she could be quite terrifying when angered. Most of the

time she was submissive, sweet, passionate and everything he'd ever wanted in a wife. He knew without a doubt, she was the reason he was as successful as he was. But when angered the last place he wanted to be was between her and whatever she was angry at, even if what she was angry at was his own son.

Petunia felt shaken. She had lost herself in mourning the children she was denied, and had failed to notice what her husband and son were doing. But that would change, she would no longer allow herself or her family to take the anger they felt at the magicals, who had put them in this situation, out on Harry. He was after all a child, he had no more choice in the matter than they did. She didn't love him. He was now a constant reminder of their stolen dreams as well as a reminder of her dead sister, but he wasn't to blame for it either. No Petunia blamed the man her sister had followed and obeyed. She blamed the man who placed Harry in their home under those thrice damned wards. She blamed Albus Dumbledore.

Chapter 2 Growing Up

At ten, Harry could never remember a time in his life when his Aunt ever said she cared about him. His Uncle flat out hated him until last year. But despite his dead parents and a not so good home life, he figured it could be worse. He'd briefly experienced worse before he was five when that odd old man had said what he did to Petunia about wards and no babies, whatever that meant. Harry knew the old man had done something in an attempt to make him forget, but Harry had a very good memory and that day had been traumatic enough that he had gone over it until he could remember almost everything. What he remembered most was what that man had said about babies, years later Harry figured out that made the infertility somehow his fault so he wasn't surprised that things got worse. He was never quite sure if his fifth birthday was the best or worst day of his life.

That day his cousin had shoved him down the stairs. He'd broken his right arm in three places, his collarbone, his left thigh just above his knee, and his left ankle, and two ribs. He had also punctured a lung and gotten a severe concussion. When Harry was released from the hospital a week later. He came home and for the next three and a half weeks it took him to recover, it was almost as if he and Dudley had switched lives. When the doctor gave him a clean bill of health, his Aunt called a family meeting. Petunia seldom laid down the law, but when she did that was it. Most of the time she let Vernon have the illusion that he wore the pants of the family, but when it came down to it all the males at #4 Privet Drive knew Petunia was boss. That day Petunia laid down the law.

"I feel that there is much we need to discuss about how things have been and how they will be in the future.

"Harry has been subject to too much scorn and bullying from both you, Vernon and Dudley. That will stop. There will be no more calling him boy or freak his name is Harry and you will both use it. Harry, we haven't been honest with you. We were told to keep certain things from you. It, those odd occurrences around you when you are upset, are caused by magic."

Vernon's sputtered, "Pet" was ignored.

"Both of your parents were magical. You are also magical. Normally the magical world is separate from the rest of the world. That is the way we like it. But sometimes someone is born in the regular world that has the powers of the magical world, your mother was one of those. On Halloween the year you turned one, an evil wizard came to your parents house and killed both your parents and he tried to kill you. No one knows why you survived, but this is where our worlds collide.

"My sister listened to the recommendations of that odd old man Albus Dumbledore, it got her and your louse of a father killed. Dumbledore was the one that brought you to us. He was the one to trap us all in this house and he is the one responsible for all the bad that has happened to this family. I do not like magic, in fact I hate it, but you cannot help what you were born. You did not ask for your parents to die, nor did you choose to be placed here with us instead of with a family in the magical world. I'm sure if you were in the magical world such things would be a blessing not a source of shame. I do not place any blame on you as you were given no say. From this time forward we shall make the best of it. But know that Albus Dumbledore is responsible. He placed you here without asking if we wanted to have you, he made no provision to see that you wouldn't be a burden on us, and he is why your magic makes you different, not normal. He's the one who said you shouldn't be told. "

"I'm sorry Aunt Petunia."

"You should be." Vernon muttered, but he subsided after a quelling glance from his wife.

"I will not ever love you or treat you the same as Dudley. You are however a human being and under my care therefore you can expect decent treatment from everyone living under this roof. You will have food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care. You will be treated with respect for your person and given appropriate privacy, we expect the same in return. In return for our care, you will be expected to do chores and attempt to keep your magic outbursts at a minimum. Understood?"

"Yes, Aunt Petunia."

"Vernon, over the years I have overlooked the way you have treated Harry but I will no longer do so. There will no longer be disrespectful name calling from you. If you can't say anything nice say nothing at all. No more spankings bordering on beatings, that teaches nothing! Except bullying! There are better ways. You will be allowed to give Harry three hours of chores a week. Taking care of the yard or washing the car that sort of thing but they must be age appropriate. Ask yourself if you would expect Dudley to do it before you assign it. No telling him to do a man's work when he is a boy.

"Dudley, I know that you are big and strong and like to have your own way. That is normal. However bullies only get so far in life, and if they are a big enough bully they get sent to jail. When you pushed your cousin down the stairs, that was the kind of bully that winds up in prison. You got a small taste of what that Harry's life is like this past month. Prison is worse. Is that what you want, or do you want to be like your father, a strong, successful, business man?"

"Like Dad."

"Then Dudley curb your impulses to bully others, and work on your manners and your schooling."

"Yes, Mum."

"Dudley and Harry, you now know about magic. You also need to know that there are laws forbidding this information being passed to anyone else. There are people who can come and wipe the memories from your mind. Albus Dumbledore has done so in front of me twice, and he wouldn't hesitate to do it again, so you cannot say a word to anyone outside this family. Understood?"

"Yes Ma'am."

And so had begun the second phase of Harry's life with the Dursleys. When ever he got punished for accidental magic (not that it was often since the binding was in place) it was Albus Dumbledore's fault because he sent Harry out of the magical world. When his uncle was denied the promotion he had wanted and worked hard for it was Dumbledore's fault because they couldn't move to a house better suited to entertain clients. When all of them wished there could be another baby in the house it was the thrice damned Dumbledore's fault that there wasn't.

All in all it hadn't been a bad life. Each year he was given additional new chores, the biggest of which strangely enough was tutoring Dudley. Petunia had seen that Harry was intelligent the way she and Lily were and that Dudley was like Vernon. Although Dudley hadn't liked being tutored by his cousin he did it rather than incur his Mum's wrath. Dudley liked to tease him and say, "Harry you are awfully girly, seeing as how you can keep house as well as Mum and like shopping." But aside from once when they were six, Dudley never deliberately dirtied the house after Harry cleaned trying to get him in trouble. Harry couldn't help but grin when he remembered that day. Aunt Petunia had looked at Dudley's smirk and Harry's panicked eyes and punished his cousin by making him do that weekend's deep cleaning, four times, until it was done to her satisfaction.

Harry's days had a planned sameness. He woke at six and got ready for the day then he and his aunt met in the kitchen. One would make breakfast for the family while the other made lunches, then they would eat. Harry and Dudley would go to school. After school Harry would come home while Dudley went to Rugby practice, or to wrestling or to the boxing gym. At home, Harry would do two loads of laundry and a touch up cleaning and start dinner before doing his schoolwork. When Dudley got home at 4:30 he would help him understand his homework and answer questions from his cousin. Tuesdays and Thursdays he would also quiz his cousin before running four miles. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday he would finish dinner by six so he could eat before his kenpo classes. He'd get home by eight thirty, check Dudley's homework then go to bed by 9:30. He and Dudley were in the top six of their class. Although some kids at school picked on him for his non-school second hand clothes, perpetually messy hair, and dorky glasses, Dudley no longer picked on him as he had when they were small. Saturday mornings he did a through cleaning of the house, before going to his kenpo class for the afternoon. Sunday he would put dinner in the slow cooker as his Aunt made breakfast. The family went to church then Sunday afternoon was spent studying, reading, or drawing while his relatives watched TV. Sometimes if they went on an outing instead, Harry would sneak in and play on Dudley's computer.

Summers were spent doing chores for his relatives in the morning. Then spending the afternoons doing odd jobs around the neighborhood to earn a little money, or reading, or drawing with materials purchased from his earnings, and occasionally going

swimming at the neighborhood pool. Most times his Aunt allowed him to come with them when they went on holiday, because she suspected odd, nosy, old Mrs. Figg from Wisteria Walk reported to Dumbledore. He never got to do everything that his cousin did on those trips. He'd never been to an amusement park for instance, but he had played in the sand by the sea and he had seen a few "educational" museums. Despite this, from his perspective going on the trips and being left in a hotel room with a TV and no one to tell him he couldn't watch and maid service, meaning no chores for him, was great.

His Aunt had allowed him to start Kenpo karate when he was seven. She heard that it helped with discipline. She also knew that Albus Dumbledore wouldn't be happy if Harry were a trained fighter, so she persuaded Vernon it would be a good thing. Harry showed a talent for it and his sensei offered to let him take additional classes in exchange for help cleaning the dojo. Harry had advanced to the point he had his third rank brown belt and helped with the white through orange belt classes on Saturday before taking his Weapons class. He was learning advanced staff and throwing stars. And Sensei spoke of him starting to learn sword soon.

He had been moved from his room in the cupboard back to the smallest bedroom when he could no longer stand without crouching. His Aunt had removed the crib and replaced the furniture in the smallest bedroom with mission style furniture, a bed, a desk, a chair and a small dresser. Harry's room had a different feel than the rest of the house but he liked it that way. His Aunt had noticed that Harry had an eye for line and color and she had decided when he was eight to reward him for his hard work, his good grades, and most of all for keeping his magic in check once a quarter by taking him shopping with her.

Harry loved those days even if it was "girly" as he cousin said it was. Dudley always had all the affection he wanted, Harry settled for what he could get. Harry tried to please his Aunt in all things because he could never make up for the price she and Uncle Vernon paid for taking him in. Aunt Petunia sometimes gifted him with a touch on the head and "well done", he lived for those moments. There were only two people in this world he hated, the evil wizard who killed his parents and Albus Dumbledore.

Harry's ninth Christmas saw him receiving the first non-clothing gift he ever got from his Aunt and Uncle, an art box with pencils, chalks, watercolors and an assortment of paper. For years Harry's Christmas and Birthday presents were usually his good clothes. Petunia supplied him with three shirts, two jumpers and two pairs of trousers for school, one nice outfit for church and social occasions, unmentionables, his karate uniform, a pair of trainers, a nice general purpose pair of shoes, and winter boots and then he had seven sets of clothes that were in good condition, a winter jacket, pajamas, dressing gown and swim trunks from the second hand store. He was sometimes teased about it but he figured it could be worse. He could be forced to wear Dudley's discards Dudley wore three sizes bigger and husky. Harry wore slims. Harry was touched by the new and different gift but was also confused he had long ago realized that for his relatives he was a means to an end. You want the house cleaned have Harry do it. You want Dudley to get decent grades have Harry help him. Harry was sure this gift was because of what had happened a week before Christmas, but that wouldn't stop him from enjoying it .

Harry had gone shopping with Dudley and Aunt Petunia It had been a snowy and cold day. The roads were very icy and Dudley had slipped and fallen in front of a lorry that was sliding instead of stopping. Harry had darted forward and done something, he wasn't sure what. First they were in front of the lorry then they weren't. He told police that his momentum must have made him and Dudley slide out of the way. They accepted his explanation, but Harry could tell from the gleam in his Aunt's eye she didn't believe it. He wasn't sure he did either because sliding wouldn't have left him tired and he had felt the radiating heat of the lorry's engine at his back. He hoped that he wouldn't get in trouble for doing it.

That day had changed many things Harry meditated on his memory and realized he had, in his panic reached through the wall that surrounded his core. He had known for many years courtesy of the meditation he'd learned in martial arts that everyone had a core light/energy that he could sense. But if his uncle was a candle and Dudley and Aunt Petunia were stove burners, he was a roaring bonfire. He was however cut off from it by a barrier. He assumed the barrier was the bind on his magic Dumbledore had placed. Harry started to deliberately try to touch his core while he meditated.

Petunia had been very contemplative Harry's ninth Christmas. She had always hated magic because she couldn't do it and she had only seen it do harm or create embarrassment. Magic had taken away many of her dreams, but she now had seen magic do good. Her despised nephew had used something she hated to save something she loved.

Marge was with them that Christmas but instead of letting her degrade Harry as she usually did Vernon stopped her, by offering a distraction instead. "Marge, I was wanting your opinion. Pet and I aren't sure of what we should do we love this house and it's just the right size for us but it lacks sufficient room for the entertaining that would help me advance at Grunings. What would you do?"

Harry ignored Marge's slightly drunken pontificating and helped Aunt Petunia with clearing the table and serving dessert. A few days later when Marge left he spoke to his Uncle. " Uncle Vernon have you and Aunt Petunia ever thought of adding on a great room? You could use it for entertaining, and that way we wouldn't leave Privet Drive but you could still get ahead."

"A great room huh? What brings this on?" Vernon asked suspiciously.

"Well I thought about your question to Marge on Christmas, and before break started I heard Shelly at school talking about how her parents had built on a great room and how much she was looking forward to their Christmas party. And well it occurred to me maybe you and Aunt Petunia could do that."

Vernon looked at his nephew. As much as he hated to admit it, the boy wasn't a terrible person. He wasn't even much of a burden anymore. He was polite, he did his chores without being reminded, he never asked for more than he was given, and he always was thankful for what he got. He found he could no longer hate him. He still didn't like him, but he didn't hate him.

When Harry was almost eleven his Uncle finally got the promotion to Vice President of Marketing in Britain at Grunnings. The great room they added to the house served it's purpose. The Dursleys celebrated with a trip. They left Harry with Mrs. Figg that trip because they were going to Euro Disney and Vernon didn't want the expense of taking Harry, they would be back three days before his

birthday. It was a week before his birthday and he was helping Mrs. Figg give one of her cats a bath when the mail arrived. To his surprise Mrs. Figg handed him a parchment envelope with emerald writing and a funny wax seal. Harry opened it. When Harry saw the name Albus Dumbledore he had to resist the urge to shred it. He read through it and found what his Aunt told him to expect. He decided to test his Aunt's theory that Mrs. Figg was a Dumbledore plant. "What a bunch of nonsense!" And he crumpled the letter and made to throw it away.

Mrs. Figg's eyes widened and she stopped him. "NO! You mustn't!"

"But it's nonsense! We await your owl? Foolishness."

"Harry I assure you, Hogwarts is quite real and you are a wizard!"

"Do you work for him, Mrs. Figg?"

Her eye widened still further when she realized what she had given away. "Do you mean He-who-Must-Not-be-Named?"

Harry's eye roll said it all.

"You mean Albus Dumbledore?"

Harry's smirk and slight nod was her answer.

She sighed Albus wouldn't like this, but she wouldn't lie to the boy since it was obvious he already knew. "Yes." she said timidly.

"How do I owl them?"

"I could forward your response through the floo."

"Fine I'll think about it."

The day his relatives returned from Paris, Harry showed Aunt Petunia his letter. "So do I or don't I?"

"If you don't they will just come and get you. We are rather powerless against them."

"Fine I'll go, but I swear to you Aunt Petunia, I won't dance to their tune. I'll march to my own drum."

"Tell them you need someone to guide you to get your supplies. I would take you but I don't remember exactly how to get there. Also mention we won't pay for your things. I'm sure your parents left something for you."

"Yes ma'am."

"You're a good boy, Harry."

Petunia Dursley inwardly smiled. Her revenge on Albus Dumbledore was going to be so sweet.

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Years ago she had been shaken horribly when she found out there would be no more children and had skirted catatonic behavior for months and part of her had never stopped asking why, what did Dumbledore have to gain by putting Harry in their home. Especially since he undoubtedly knew of the bad blood between herself and Lily. While she was at the hospital with Harry it dawned on her. Harry's father had been a selfish spoiled lord, which meant power. She didn't know anything of the Magical world and wouldn't spoil Harry, since she hated his father and didn't get along with his mother. Harry would be ignorant at best and possibly abused and malleable and if he was treated poorly, Dumbledore would make his life in the magical world heavenly by comparison and Harry would do anything the old fart wanted in gratitude. If Harry grew up naïve, and downtrodden it was to Dumbledore's advantage, well she never agreed to be part of his scheme, she was paying a heavy price for his manipulations too. She would see to it Dumbledore was denied what he sought, just as he had dared deny her her dreams of a daughter and more sons and success for Vernon.

Petunia had carefully considered what Harry would need to be like, she had a fine line to walk as well it wouldn't do for Dumbledore to get wind of this nor would it do for her to put her desire for revenge ahead of Dudley and Vernon. The hours at the hospital had given her time to plan. First she had put a stop to the almost criminal behavior of her husband and son towards Harry. The family meeting

had been followed by a long private chat with Vernon to explain things.

Training them, especially Harry, to have fine manners well that took a while, but her own experience and DeBrett's were enough. There was the household managing she taught him as part of his chores, and the accounting class she had him take in school.

Getting Harry training to be a warrior, that had taken much persuading. Harry's light almost feminine build had helped with that. She had persuaded Vernon that since the boy had enemies in the magical world he needed to be able to defend himself. But she allowed that the traditional English defense of boxing that so suited his and Dudley's well built physique wasn't suited to Harry's. Vernon had agreed that that foreign namby-pamby karate probably would suit the boy better. Petunia had selected the deadliest one available.

Petunia had forbidden the boy TV, and computers but had encouraged him to read history and political philosophy. She had also seen to it he learned strategy games. When she took him and Dudley to the park Dudley played on the playground while Harry learned chess from the acknowledged chess master of the park. He also was taught bridge by acting as a fourth with her bridge club, and his sensei taught him go. She wanted Harry to be sly and sneaky, so on the sly she allowed him to play the computer games that taught planning and conservation of resources. It wasn't hard just take Dudley's usual games, and replace them with the ones she wanted him to play on Sundays when the rest of the family was going out.

When Harry was nine she allowed herself to seemingly slip occasionally in her manipulating of him and she and was more transparent in her manipulation of Dudley and Vernon. As result, she watched him pick it up as well. Harry's reaction to his letter was everything she could have hoped. She had his loyalty and all it had cost her was what she owed Harry as a blood relative anyway. The occasional crumb of affection together with decent treatment on life basics was a cheap price to pay for her revenge.

Chapter 3 Diagon Alley

On Harry's birthday to Petunia's dismay a giant man appeared to take him for his things. Petunia, despite her fears and distaste, insisted on coming along. Harry was horrified by the reaction of the occupants of the Leaky Cauldron to his making an appearance. But much to Petunia's pleasure by the time they entered the alley Harry recovered his composure. Harry got a calculating expression on his face as they walked by a few stores with small signs claiming to have Potter approved merchandise. Hagrid lead them to Gringott's. Harry went and collected money from his vault. Petunia stayed in the lobby and waited. When Harry exited into the lobby his frown gave even the decidedly green Hagrid pause. "What's wrong Harry?"

"I have some questions for the goblins."

"But we need to get yer things."

Harry wasn't about to be steered away from this, but who knew if this insanely loyal to Dumbledore oaf could be useful later. How to do this without creating a problem... "Hagrid you don't look like you feel too good, how about you go get something to soothe that stomach of yours. I'll stay here until you're back and Aunt Petunia will stay with me."

"Yeh sure?"

"Yes I'm just a little confused about a couple things I'm sure the goblins will clear it right up."

"Alrigh' if yer sure?"

Petunia stepped forward, "We'll be fine." After Hagrid left they got in line again. When they got to the teller Petunia said. "We have questions regarding my nephew's account."

Harry handed the teller his key.

Frowning and handing it back the teller said, "You need to speak with the account manager. That hallway at the desk ask for Barchok."

"Thank you." They both said.

Three minutes later they were in a small office with a very grumpy looking goblin. Who snarled, "What?"

"We have questions about my nephew's account." Petunia said.

He looked at Harry's key. "Potter huh? Those accounts are inactive status. It'll take at least two more likely four hours to pull them. Come back later."

They nodded and headed back to the lobby where a few minutes later they were joined by Hagrid.

Hagrid led them to Madame Malkins, where Harry met his first magical child.

The blond boy took one look at Petunia next to Harry and gave a disdainful sniff as if they both smelled bad and muttered to the seamstress hemming his robes , "Could you serve a lower class clientele? At least he won't be in Slytherin, Hufflepuff is more likely."

Harry and Petunia both frowned but were polite to the shop keeper as she helped them. Harry wanted the midrange quality robes with comfort and three times growth charms. His list said three robes but he got four. He wasn't crazy about the idea of wearing a dress but figured this fell into the when in Rome category.

Petunia asked the shopkeeper "Do students wear their robes all the time at school?"

Madame Malkin replied, "Muggleborns usually wear regular muggle clothes on the weekend. And witches and wizards usually have non school robes to wear."

Petunia said, "My nephew will need four non school robes as well. And do wizards have fancier robes for special occasions as well?"

"Yes. They're called dress robes."

"One set of dress robes then." Petunia ignored Harry's indignant gaze. "You will dress as befits your station as Lord Potter, Harry."

At that moment Madam Malkin suddenly realized who she was serving and pounced on him giving him a hug.

Harry fought the urge to kick free.

After a moment Madame Malkin came back to herself and released him. "I'm so sorry, I'm just so honored."

"Yes, you're welcome. My robes?" they spent twenty minutes picking the additional robes and cloaks two for school and one just because. Harry chose a dark forest green velvet trimmed with a emerald green satin brocade for his dress robes and his additional cloak both marked with the Potter crest, midnight blue, gunmetal gray, dark burgundy, and a dark, almost black, purple for his other robes. Madam Malkin had tried to steer him to other brighter colors but Harry could not be deterred. "Who is wearing them?" he asked. They left the shop and Madam Malkin promised to owl the dress robes that evening.

Hagrid led them to the parchment store. Harry was appalled. Quills! What was this, the Middle Ages? He bought the recommended amounts of parchment and ink, a bottle of color changing ink, an ever full dicta-quill figuring it could be useful for note taking, and four quills so he could figure out what kind he liked if any. Figuring if he didn't he'd just use the steel nib pen he had in his drawing stuff. He ordered parchment marked with his family crest for correspondence with the goblins or possibly solicitors and sealing wax. He saw and got a "So You Want to Write" Kit it was a basic calligraphy instruction guide aimed at children just learning to write but since Harry had never held a quill he figured it was a good idea.

Then they went to the bookstore. In Flourish & Blotts Harry and Petunia weren't sure which way to look. Hagrid helped Harry collect his school books while Petunia got in line to get some help finding books she knew Harry would need for their plans. She heard a boy ask for a muggleborn information pack, and figured Harry would need one of those as well. She got to the counter and the clerk asked "May I help you?"

"Yes I was wondering if there are any books on etiquette and sort of a who's who in the wizarding world. Also I need a muggleborn information pack."

Petunia ignored the clerk's rolled eyes and followed her to the section with the requested books. Natures Nobility:A Wizarding Genealogy, Helga's Guide Of Do's and Don'ts For Young Witches and Wizards,Witches and Wizards Past and Present That Have Influenced our World Self Updating Twenty-first Century Edition. Petunia figured that would be a good start.

"Anything else I can help you find?"

"History." The clerk lead her to another part of the store, on the way they walked past the children's section. Petunia was both surprised and outraged to see Harry's name on many of the books for sale. "Excuse me but who-"

"Harry Potter? He's the Boy-Who-Lived, savior of the wizarding world." the clerk gushed.

"Really?" Petunia drawled. "Can I get one of each?"

The clerk cheerfully started pulling them while directing Petunia to go two more rows and on the left to the History section. In the History Section she found many books four mentioned Harry prominently and she was furious that there was a book called Tragedy and Triumph: The Potter Story by Rita Skeeter. Harry met her there and grabbed the book that was to be his textbook. "Anything else Aunt Petunia? Oh wait there's a book about Hogwarts, I think I want to know as much as I can before I go there."

"I'll just grab a last few, I'll meet you at the register."

Harry left and the clerk came up, "Is there anything else?"

"Yes, does this store have any books about laws governing the wizarding world?" Petunia gave the clerk a bright smile. She found a couple of books about the specific laws she was most interested in (libel, child protection, and muggle protection) and one of general laws that she figured Harry had better know. Harry wound up using his trust vault key to authorize payment for all the books they got. Petunia was relieved that Hagrid was mostly hanging back and not supervising their every purchase or she suspected that Dumbledore would be a very unhappy man.

The giant then led them to the next shop. Harry had encouraged Hagrid to blather on about what he thought and the magical world since Harry "didn't know anything." Hagrid lead the way into the cauldron shop, where Harry got the pewter cauldron he was supposed to, the scales, and Dragonhide Gloves. He looked at the telescopes but asked, "Aunt Petunia, up in the attic at home there's that 114mm reflector telescope Dudley got at the Grunning's employee picnic, he doesn't care about it. Heck he's never even taken it from its box, and it's just collecting dust. Would it be possible for me to take that one to school instead of spending money on one of these?"

Harry's sense of thrift pleased her. She agreed.

"If he needs protective gloves then why aren't there goggles as well?" Petunia asked. Hagrid ignored her and so did the shop keeper. Harry thought it a valid question and resolved to use some of his new found wealth to get a pair.

Then they went to the apothecary, this was one of the stores that had one of those Potter signs that Harry and Petunia found so annoying. Harry approached the shop owner and overheard him say to a customer who by the looks of him had to be related to that obnoxious boy from the robe shop. "A Slytherin first year kit."

"Here you go Mr. Malfoy. That will be six galleons."

The blond threw the money on the counter "Six Galleons, highway robbery if you ask me."

"Don't blame me, it's those extras the Professor wants his snakes to have."

The blond brushed past Harry.

"What's the difference?" Harry asked.

"Who are you?"

"I want to know the difference between the standard student kit and a Slytherin kit."

"Snape has three supplemental guides and a better quality and variety of tools in the Slytherin kit so his students can have a leg up. Oh and the vials are charmed unbreakable."

"What about the actual potion supplies?"

"Those are bought by the school and kept in a student supply cupboard. Part of your tuition."

"I want a Slytherin kit and you're going to give it to me for the price of a standard kit."

"Why should I do that, you brat?"

"Because I'm Harry Potter," He briefly brushed his hair from his forehead. "and you've been using my name to promote your store without my permission. You co-operate and I'll keep my mouth shut. You don't, well it could be bad for business."

"You sound enough like a snake. I reckon old Severus won't be too happy, he hated your Da, he did."

Three galleons later Harry left the store. At the trunk store a similar thing happened. The shop owner fussed a bit more, before giving in and agreeing to sell any trunk to Harry at cost. Harry carefully examined all the trunks. Hagrid came in and asked what was taking so long. Harry merely acted the excited schoolboy wanting to know more about all his possible options. Hagrid wandered back out. Harry finally decided on a three compartment trunk with a magic signature lock and featherlight charms. He noticed school bags but didn't like them and asked if the shopkeeper had ever charmed a muggle backpack. After a little grumbling and some dickering the shopkeeper agreed to charm a pack if Harry sent it to him. As he bid them good day, he mentally allowed the BWL was a nice enough kid and no doubt the boy would do well in his old house.

As they left the store *Hagrid checked his list. "Just your wand left-oh yeah, and I still haven't got yeh a birthday present."

Harry blushed. "You don't have to-"

"I know I don't have to. Tell yeh what, I'll get yer animal, not a toad, toads went out of fashion years ago, yeh'd be laughed at-and I don't

like cats, they make me sneeze. I'll get yer an owl. All the kids want owls, they're dead useful, carry yer mail an everythin'."*

Harry looked at his aunt her lips were pursed. She didn't like animals he knew.

Petunia looked at Harry's pleading green eyes "You'll keep it and its things clean no smell and no noise and only in your room, understood?"

"Yes ma'am."

"And Harry, no movie for your birthday this year."

Harry nodded it was worth it. Twenty minutes later they left Eeylops Owl Emporium. On Harry's shoulder rested a snowy owl. The shop owner had had her a year, and had given Hagrid a discount he was so pleased to finally get rid of her. She had refused to leave the store with every one who had wanted her in the past. Harry had bought a perch instead of a cage because she had turned her beak up at even the largest cage. Harry thanked both Hagrid and his Aunt profusely.

Hagrid led them down the street to a shop that read Ollivander's Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C. Harry couldn't wait. Unfortunately he had to. Mr. Ollivander had greeted them, told Harry about his parents wands then proceeded to try every wand in the shop. The closest to a match was a holly and phoenix feather wand but even it reacted to Harry's touch by setting the pile of tried and discarded wands on fire.

Mr. Ollivander quickly put it out but a few wands were destroyed anyway. As Mr. Ollivander looked at his destroyed stock in dismay he sighed and said, "I'm afraid I can't match you Mr. Potter."

Hagrid looked dumbfounded.

Harry's emerald eyes filled with tears. "How can I be a wizard without a wand?" he almost wailed in disappointment.

Mr. Ollivander hated crying children. "None of that, I have a friend he makes custom wands, I occasionally buy the odd wand from him. Your mother's was actually one of his. I'm sure he can help you."

Hagrid was appalled when Ollivander flipped his sign to closed and led them straight to Knockturn Alley. At the far end of the alley Ollivander turned to him. "Hagrid, you'll have to wait here there won't be room for you and the stairway is to rickety."

They entered the second story workshop.

"What are you doing here Ollie?"

"A difficult customer I was unable to match him. Harry this is Thaddeus Marcello."

If Harry thought that Ollivander was old, this man was positively ancient. "Come here boy."

He took some measurements by casting a quick spell, then he lead Harry to a bin of 2"x2"x 24" inch pieces of wood. He cast another spell on Harry. "Run your fingers across them if they feel warm pull them out. Harry did as he was told. The first piece he pulled was almost white. The second was almost black. A third was the color of wheat, a fourth was a warm red. Mr. Ollivander and the other man both looked very surprised.

"No wonder I couldn't match him."

The man then pulled a trunk out. It opened and opened and opened. It was as tall as Harry and fully opened it surrounded him The man said "Close your eyes. Spin around three times. Take a deep breath and find your core. Then let it tell you what drawer to open. Take your time. You want to do this right."

Harry did as he was told. Thanks to his years of experience with karate he was quick to drop into a meditative trance, he focused on his bonfire. A moment later he turned and pulled open a drawer. Then he opened his eyes. In the drawer was a feather. It was was long and silvery white and when he touched it it seemed to glitter iridescently.

Both the old men gasped.

"What?"

"Snow Phoenix feather. I came by it in an odd fashion. The bird appeared in my workshop eleven years ago shook the feather from its tail then vanished in a swirl of snow. In fact it was eleven years ago to the very day.

"Alright for multiple wood wands I use a metal binder so come here." The old man said as he closed the case of wand cores. He extended a potion "Dip your hands in this. Touch all these metals."

Harry saw a rows of small ingots: gold, silver, bronze, copper, pewter and iron. The silver ingot in the third row glowed. The wand maker took it. "Peruvian silver. Now touch these." He handed Harry some stones.

Harry looked at them. They each had something Harry did not recognize carved on them.

Seeing Harry's puzzled look, Mr. Ollivander said, "Runes. You can study them in third year at Hogwarts."

Harry touched the stones one by one, eleven of the runes glowed when he touched the stone.

"Okay one last thing," the wand maker said. "I want you to to go to your meditative state again, a wand like the one I'll make you, requires a stone to balance the focus. Most wands don't require it, but most wands aren't elemental wands either." Seeing Harry's puzzled look he continued." The white wood is elder it is almost never used for wands, it is of the fire element. The black wood is ebony of water. The light golden wood is maple of earth. The reddish wood is cedar of air. Phoenix feather wands are very rare enough I've only made a couple dozen in my life. But I have never before used a snow phoenix feather." the wand maker pulled out a box of mixed gem stones and spread them on a cloth of velvet.

Petunia gasped there were several thousand pounds worth of gems there .

Harry meditated but felt no pull to any of the gems. He lifted his eyes back up. "Nothing, does that mean you can't make my wand.?"

The man looked at Harry putting a hand on his head. Harry fought the urge to move away. The man brushed his bangs away from his

forehead for a moment. "You're a Potter. I'll give you something to give your account manager so he'll let you in the family vault. I would bet there will be a chest of unset gems in the family vault. Check there first. If you find one send it to me. If not, I've got some other people we can check with. You'll have your wand in time for school. Now for price. Ollie's wands run from four galleons up to what twelve?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to charge you a hundred, some of that is because wand wood is expensive and you are using not one wand blank but four. And the Elder wand wood is exceptionally rare. There's approximately a galleon's worth of silver in the ingot. Your core is super rare not just rare like an ordinary phoenix feather but very once in a lifetime rare. Most wizards will see a phoenix maybe once or twice in their lives. But I'm the only wizard I know that has seen a snow phoenix, in fact there are some that say snow phoenixes are a myth. Materials alone for this wand is pushing sixty galleons. The other forty is for my knowledge, my skill, my magic if you will. We can take care of it now or do half now half when it's done."

Harry again used his key to create a draft, he wrote it for two thirds. "I'll get you the rest when the wand is done."

Hagrid got a relieved look on his face when they came out of the building an hour after they went in . Petunia spoke quickly "Hagrid we have to go back to the bank for something."

"I've got to leave soon, Dumbledore will be wondering where I am."

"I'm capable of looking after my nephew."

"But-"

Petunia gave him her most fierce look.

Hagrid cringed a bit. He escorted them back to Gringott's. "Righ' here Harry. Here's yer ticket and I'll see yeh at school." he said then departed.

They went back to Barchok's office. The grumpy goblin gestured them in. "Right, what are your questions?"

"Um. I would like a ledger showing me all my assets and any disbursements that have been made since my parents deaths. If you have a copy of my parents wills, I'd like to see that too, please. Griphook said that the vault I went to is my trust vault does that mean I have other vaults ? If so, who holds my keys?"

"That would be Albus Dumbledore. He has held the keys for your trust vault, the heirloom vault, and the Potter Family money vault. To see the wills I need you to fill out this form and add a drop of your blood to the bottom or sign with a blood quill, that will allow you as heir to override the Wizengamot seal." He handed a them a scroll, that when unrolled was four feet long. He took a book after checking that it was indeed blank he said a spell in what Harry assumed was Goblin. Then checked the book again. "Here is a self updating copy of the ledger of assets. It also shows all disbursements."

Harry looked at the ledger he was now glad his Aunt had made him take that accounting class. "What's this entry it happens every month since November 1981?"

"That would be the Guardian stipend for your care."

"We have never received a stipend for Harry's care." Petunia blurted. "Every penny has come from our own pocket."

The Goblin frowned. He checked another ledger. "Why was this account never drawn from?"

Harry thought for a moment. "My Aunt and Uncle were never told it was there. As muggles they can't exactly enter Diagon Alley to come get it. Is it possible to convert it to pounds and transfer it to their bank in Surrey and actually make that an automatic thing?"

"Yes, I'll do so immediately."

"You said earlier that the Potter accounts are inactive what did you mean?" Petunia asked.

"The family vaults are closed. Nothing in, nothing out except the guardian stipend and taxes. Trust vault couldn't be touched until the boy's eleventh birthday and can only be used to pay for school and

school related expenses. Waste of jercor habloth..." He mumbled off into what Harry and Petunia assumed was the goblin language.

"You mean my nephew has money in this bank and it isn't earning interest?"

"Due to laws constraining the Goblin Nation, we have to have direct permission from an account holder or their legal representative to invest in profitable enterprise. With the hub-bub at the end of the last war proper permissions were never given therefore the gold has sat unused and unable to earn interest."

"What would it take to make the vaults active so they can earn interest?" Harry asked.

The goblin instantly perked up. "Permission from your legal guardian, and only the money vaults would be affected. The Heirloom vault would be unchanged."

"Would my guardian be the one who holds my keys or my Aunt?"

"Who has physical custody of you?"

"I do." Petunia answered.

"Then she can give permission, in fact if she fills out this form," He handed them an twelve inch scroll. "she can make Gringott's your financial trustee instead of Dumbledore. Safeguards are in place so the physical guardian and the financial trustee are different on this account when the holder is a minor and have been for the last three hundred years. We goblins get paid ten percent of what ever percent profit your gold earns. It is in our interest to see your money makes as much profit as possible. And Gringott's can recall any keys currently held by Albus Dumbledore."

It took a few minutes for Petunia and the goblin to get the form filled out. But there was an expression of glee on both Petunia and Harry's faces as they signed it, not even wincing as they signed the form with a blood quill.

"Marvelous." The goblin intoned. "Now is there anything else Gringott's can do for you today?"

"Yes." Harry handed Barchok the note from Mr. Marcello. "And I want to convert these galleons to pounds so I can get some things in the muggle world, like contacts, and art supplies, and protective goggles."

"Contacts?"

"Yes they're like glasses except they go in your eye and they're harder to lose."

"Might I suggest going to a magical optician instead. Medi-witch Chang has premises close to Ollivanders."

"I'd be willing to give it a try. But as to Mr. Marcello's note..."

"Well seeing as how Gringott's is now your financial trustee I believe it will be possible for you to visit the family heirloom vault. I'll get my assistant convert these while I take you to the vault."

He led the way to the carts. And they all climbed in. Petunia shrieked as they rode down to a vault that seemed to Harry to be deeper than even the Vault where Hagrid had picked up his mysterious package. Barchok got out and opened the vault. Harry went in. Barchok followed Harry and Petunia in and said a phrase in goblin. Suddenly the room lit up. It was like Aladdin's cave of wonders. One wall held bookcases. There was medieval armor and weapons and many chests. Barchok led them to a chest not far from the bookcase, Harry opened it. It was full of gemstones. He closed his eyes and rapidly dropped into a trance. As he reached with his magical senses he could feel it. The perfect stone was here. He plunged his hand into the chest and stirred it a little as he worked his hand down and in to the stone. Moments later he had it, he opened his eyes and pulled it out anxious to see what it was.

A light blue stone, its color reminded him of tropical seas, it was cut and faceted brilliantly. Barchok took it and examined it. "Ah yes beautiful, I remember when my grandfather spoke of your Great-great-great-grandfather bringing this stone in. It is a 74 carat dark blue aquamarine of the highest quality, brilliant oval cut, nearly flawless. When I say nearly, it is merely because it is beryl, and therefore it intrinsically has a flaw, all beryls do. I believe he found the stone in Brazil and I believe he had dwarves do the faceting."

They started moving back towards the door and Harry tripped. He looked to see what he had tripped on. It was a small chest with Harry's name carved on the top. "What the..?"

Barchok looked to see what he had tripped on. "Oh my, I can't believe I forgot."

"What?" Harry asked.

"Your first birthday, your mother brought that chest in she said you were to get it on your eleventh birthday. I was only an teller then, it was supposed to go in your trust vault. Take it with you. In the meantime I'll have a courier run this to Mr. Marcello."

"Thank you, I wasn't looking forward to walking down that street again without Mr. Ollivander and Mr. Hagrid." Petunia said.

"My pleasure, I'm very pleased that the Potter fortune will be getting back into circulation. It means money for both the Potters and the Goblins. Is there anything else?"

"Is there a Potter family solicitor?"

"The firm Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent has handled the affairs of the Potter family since 1980."

"Would you recommend that firm?" Petunia watched as Barchok frowned. "I'll take that as a no. Is there another firm you do recommend?"

"Davies, Corner, and Ogden. They are not as "light" nor as big but they are very good at what they do."

"Very good, could you make an appointment for me with the second firm you mentioned?"

"Of course, I'll owl you once it is made. Should we have it here or should I arrange a room at the Leaky Cauldron.?"

I would prefer to meet in my home. But I'm not sure the wards will allow it. I'll arrange a room someplace in London not far from here. All those back guardianship payments will come in handy, How much was it again?"

"A hundred fifty galleons a month, for the last one hundred seventeen months, converts to eighty seven thousand seven hundred fifty pounds which will be deposited into your account in Surrey before closing today. And each month Harry resides with you a seven hundred and fifty pound deposit will be made."

Petunias inhaled sharply, "I believe that will more than repay any expenses Harry incurred. In fact I suspect a shopping trip for some new things is in order."

Harry and Petunia took a moment to put all their purchases into the trunk Harry had bought. Exhausted they headed for home. Harry told his owl to follow them in the air so they wouldn't be as noticeable as they traveled.

Chapter 4 Finding out about the magical world

On their return from Diagon Alley, they quickly made dinner and then Petunia proceeded with the plans for a movie with Vernon and Dudley. After setting up the perch for his new owl, Harry dove into all the things they had gotten in the Alley and started sorting and stowing it appropriately into his school trunk. He carefully left the box from his mother on his pillow as a reward for doing his work first.

Harry found his new trunk fascinating. It was 32"x18"x 14"on the outside. His robes went into the first compartment which looked and acted like the old fashioned wardrobe steamer trunks but with enough space for his entire wardrobe both wizard and muggle with room to spare. Harry bet himself in fact there would be room for four more wardrobes just like it.

The second compartment had racks, four of them. each rack looked like it was 30"x4"x13" when they were stowed, but when pulled up each rack was actually 30"x 20"x 5'6" with shelves that magically adjusted for the size of the books on it. His books, he carefully sorted. Some books he decided were must read all of before school, some were read the first few chapters, and some were read when there is time. He grimaced as he racked them into his trunk, this was really going to cut into his drawing time. He only left out the books and pamphlets of the muggle born packet to read tonight. He did it for two reasons, one he liked to keep things tidy, and two he doubted his Uncle would appreciate books about magic being left about.

The third compartment was a little different there were straps in the lid that the shop keeper told him were to hold three partly shrunken broomsticks, then there were two trays one shallow that he used for his parchment and one deep enough for his potions kit and the box from his mother. Under that was where he stored his cauldron and the telescope he retrieved from the attic. This compartment's insides like the others exceeded the outside by quite a bit but Harry sensed it only got as large as was required by the contents. Now all he needed was his wand and a few miscellaneous items and he was ready to go to Hogwarts.

Harry tidied his room and got ready for bed. He both longed to and dreaded opening the box from the vault what if ... Suck it up he told himself. He touched the latch only to snatch his hand back as it

pricked his finger. A moment later the latch fell open. Harry carefully opened the box.

Inside was a photograph and it was moving. It was of a man with messy hair and glasses, a stunningly beautiful red haired woman and a baby with the same dark hair as the man. The two adults cuddled the infant and took turns holding his hands and kissing them, and helping him wave at their observer. Harry traced his fingers over the adults. "Mum? Dad?" He reluctantly put the photo aside after a few minutes. There was a stone amulet of some sort on a silken cord, and a ring that had a coat of arms carved into it's surface, two letters, and a blank parchment. The ring was of a metal Harry hadn't seen before and he could tell it was meant to be used as a seal because it was in reverse. He wished he understood heraldry and the symbology of the seal there was a stag reared up on its hind legs on one side, a griffin in the same position on the other side, the helmet at the top looked to the stag it looked like the might be some sort of crown like object at the base of the helm. There was a bar with something so small he couldn't distinguish it and three five petaled flowers of some sort in the fields either side of the bar. . And across the bottom it read Potter. Harry put the ring aside and looked at the letters. Which to read first?

Harry decided to open the smaller of the two first.

Bambi,

As you open this you are eleven, I hope I'm standing beside you but if not I hope my death had meaning. If I am not there I'm sure Padfoot, Moony, and Wormtail are, and I'm sure they have taught you the fine art of pranking. I don't have a lot to say. General life advice, live each day like it's your last and never miss a chance for laughter. Find the woman of your dreams. (As a Potter you'll have that dream tonight, so you'll know her when you meet her, but do stop and smell the roses you meet along the way.) Do whatever it takes to win her to your side, and live a long happy life. Don't take the family motto of Pro Fidelibus (faithful in defense) too seriously. Be generous with those you call friends, and never fail to humiliate your enemies. Hopefully you have grown up in a world without He who must not be named (I don't put much stock in the prophecy Dumbledore insisted we hide because of. Not that you and Neville couldn't kick the snake's butt, but why should you have to? You have us adults to take care of that.) While you're at Hogwarts study

hard(I'm sure you're brilliant, like your mum.), play quidditch (You're a natural on a broom but don't ever tell your mum I put you on mine and you flew like a pro at one year old.), and pull pranks. I'm sure you'll be the best lion ever. I love you,

Dad

P.S. I loaned Albus my cloak but it was only a loan if he hasn't given it back get it from him. And the blank Parchment in the box touch it with your wand and say "I solemnly swear I'm up to no good, second generation." Peter lost his copy to Filch fourth year a mere month after we finished it. Sirius' brother burned his fifth year (Regulus didn't know what it was only that Padfoot treasured it), and Moony's got torn to shreds during last month's full moon. but your Marauder map has all the latest and greatest improvements that your godfathers, I, and your mum could think up. Not to mention all the other things we found after we did the first edition map. Details are on the map. Happy pranking!

P.S.2 Put the ring in the box on your right little finger, then you will be properly vested as the Potter heir, you can't take the Lord's ring until I die or you are of age, but the heir's ring will help you socially.

As Harry finished the letter he felt a melancholy pang. His father apparently thought his friends would be there for Harry but they weren't. He got the feeling that his Dad was a very fun person, however based on Aunt Petunia's few words about him, his sense of humor didn't appeal to everyone. He wondered why his father called him Bambi. Then Harry slipped the ring onto his finger and was startled when it re-sized itself to fit. Harry then opened the next letter.

The writing on this letter was smaller, and delicately precise much like his own.

Harry,

Happy birthday my darling boy! Hopefully I'm right there with you, but it is an uncertain world we live in and life doesn't come with guarantees. If I'm not I hope your godfather, Sirius, lived up to his responsibilities, failing that I'm sure your godmother Alice Longbottom stepped forward. However if neither of them is in your life, I'm positive Minerva McGonagall did a fine job raising you.

When I write this we are living in hiding. Before you were born there was a Prophecy given about the one who would defeat Voldemort. While I don't put much stock in prophecy, Voldemort does. So Albus thought it best that we and the Longbottoms go into hiding. Alice and I were great friends at school and she had her son twelve hours before I had you. But of course you know this because you and Neville have grown up together, given I am his godmother as Alice is yours. There are so many things I want to show you and teach you, but if you are reading this without me, I will only be able to warn you and ask that you do your best to learn them on your own.

First I am muggleborn. Many in the magical world hold that against me, never mind that I was headgirl at Hogwarts and I bested many that try to call themselves my better. There are those that will insult you as a halfblood, and many, many more that will insult me to anger you. Tell them talk is cheap and proof is in the actual learning and doing of magic. I know that will shut them up because you have on more than one occasion actually wowed me with your accidental magic. If I raised you, you no doubt know of the muggle world, if not then learn about it. Not From Muggle Studies at Hogwarts, learn about it from a muggleborn and going and experiencing it for yourself. You have family in the muggle world I have a sister Petunia Dursley her husband's name is Vernon. She has a son a little older than you. They don't like magic but after what your idiot father did at their wedding I can't really blame them. If you contact them be kind even if they are rude. They are quite helpless against magic after all.

Your father is a pureblood. The Potters are an Ancient and Noble house. There are only six such families left in Magical Great Britain. Unlike many of the Ancient and Noble houses once every five or six generations the Potters tend to marry muggleborn witches and, as the portrait of your three greats grandfather puts it, freshen the blood. It is an illustrious bloodline Harry. One day you will be a baron, just as Neville will one day be an earl, and your godfather will one day be a viscount. While James and his father are only children his mother was not, she was a Black. Dorea Black to be exact. Through her you have many cousins sadly only a few are worth claiming. Sirius of course, Andromeda Tonks, and much further away on the family tree are the Weasleys and the Longbottoms most other Blacks are purebloods and followers of Voldemort. Never let someone's blood status influence you Harry. It is just a bunch of bullshit anyway, made up by someone trying to feel superior. If anything it backfires on them, the mental effects of inbreeding are

becoming noticeable. Sirius' cousin Bellatrix is certifiable and sometimes his manic behavior pushes that limit. Others are simple minded or almost squibs because of it.

I love your father, and he can be the sweetest and most wonderful man, but he can also be the world's most insensitive idiot. I finally decided that the joys and sweetness he brought outweighed the anger his idiocies most of which stem from his pureblood and spoiled upbringing. Magic has a way of smoothing away the things that would sometimes otherwise keep people apart. Our getting together largely came about after he grew up a little and realized carrying a joke too far isn't funny, and some lines shouldn't be crossed. Some of that came about because his parents died and some of that was because his friends almost got a rival as well as one of his dear friends killed in the name of a prank. He is a loyal friend and a fierce protector of those he loves. He is already done with his letter. I'm sure he encouraged you to play pranks and risk your neck playing quidditch at Hogwarts. I'm also sure he has encouraged you to join Gryffindor. I will not. Not that I was ashamed to be a lion, if anything I was proud to be one; but it's more important to be a good person and do your best than worry about your house. Something I never told your father was that I was considered for all the houses. I love you no matter what you are, be it lion, badger, eagle, or even snake.

In the box there is an amulet, I made it for you. It has three spells. When you go off to Hogwarts I expect you'll be like your father and get into at least a bit of mischief/trouble I wanted a way to locate you, so the first spell is a tracking spell I've keyed it with my blood so I'm the only one to be able to use it. The second is a spell to protect your mind, it is a complex magic, at low level such as someone wanting a general sense of your mood it won't block, but if some one were to be deep scanning you it would block it and heat up to warn you to get away from the person doing it. The third spell is one to wake you if someone sends a stunner at you, it is purely for defense. Your attacker would expect you to be unconscious but you will be awake. The stone I used is Larimar, it's mythology is that it helps us to view events from a different perspective, to soften and enlighten, and to heal the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual body. I find it's sea color calms me. I found this stone during James' and my honeymoon in the Dominican Republic. It is a small piece of us for you to carry with you.

Now about school I've already covered the topic of house. I wish my expectations to be clear Harry you will keep yourself in the top ten of your class at Hogwarts. For your third year electives I recommend Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, and Care of Magical Creatures. Divination needs a gift, Muggle studies is so far out of touch it's not worth the time. Other magics worth learning are healing, warding, curse breaking and although many people frown about it occlumency. I highly recommend the last because it is the only sure defense against wizards who would read your mind. The earlier you learn it the better and easier it is to learn.

The reason I recommend it is that I had a friend that was a natural legillimence. We grew up together. Severus was a halfblood and his home life left a lot to be desired, but he was very powerful and smart. Your father resented the fact that I was friends with Severus. Their rivalry was the stuff of legends. Sev was in Slytherin, and well, it didn't sit too well with anyone that Sev and I were friends. Sev had one habit that drove me a little crazy he was a natural at mind magic. I learned occlumency by third year because well a girl likes to have her secrets and when you're around a natural legillimence like Sev, there are no secrets without it. Sev blurted stuff I wanted kept private a few too many times. I would say that Sev was another person you could look to for guidance, but for what happened the end of fifth year and after. That rival I mentioned your father's friends almost killing, that was Sev. It happened the evening after your father pulled an exceptionally humiliating prank and I tried to defend Sev. He reacted badly out of pride and called me mudblood. Mudblood is an exceptionally derogatory putdown applied to muggleborns. I got angry and it was the end of our friendship, although it was wrong and immature of me to keep the grudge as long as I did. It was after that that Sev embraced the darkness that exists in Slytherin house and it was too late. I regret that.

That would be my one warning if you are sorted there. Slytherin has a reputation for Darkness and it is poorly regarded by the other houses. It makes it easy for you feel like the weight of expectation is you will be dark. If you're sorted there go against the flow. Slytherin is the house for the ambitious Sev became the youngest Potion Master in three hundred years and he was well on his way to his Defense Mastery when I wrote this. Cunning and ambitious don't have to mean dark.

Lastly I would warn you. You are a Potter that means money, power and prestige. You are also the subject of prophecy, there will be those who seek to control, use and manipulate you. Some will be obvious, some will be very subtle. Trust, but not too deeply. Sometimes I fear we have trusted wrongly, James ploughs ahead as if there is only one course. I stay with my husband and I will stay the course. But if we are not beside you as you read this, chart your own course and don't let seemingly harmless kindly old men steer you.

With all my love and affection,

Lily Elizabeth Potter

Harry wiped away tears. "I will Mother." He then placed the amulet around his neck and the letter back in the box. His owl hopped off her perch by the window and seemed to want to comfort him. He stroked her feathers and smiled as she pecked lightly at the amulet around his neck. He wondered if all the people his mother mentioned were dead. Then it occurred to him that a woman named Minerva McGonagall was the deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts, he wondered if it was the same woman.

The next two weeks saw Harry and Petunia doing prodigious amounts of reading. Harry read the muggle born information packet, Hogwarts: A History so he would know about the school and more importantly the school rules, and the books his Aunt told him were must reads: the general laws, the etiquette book, the wizarding genealogy and the who's who. He also spent time figuring out the ledger, and realized he owned four properties. An apartment building in London, a cottage in Godric's Hollow in Wales, a small fifteen room manor in Staffordshire, and a beach house in Brighton. When he told Petunia her lips tightened and she frowned. Harry also read through a list of everything in the heirloom vault and wanted to get some of the family journals it listed to read.

In addition he skimmed all of his textbooks then read and made detailed notes on the first three chapters of each book. He also read the one of the books from his potions kit that explained proper techniques for potion ingredient prep. Harry practiced the different cuts and getting them precise as he prepared dinners, lunches, and breakfasts. Petunia had given him odd looks until he explained what he was doing after which she nodded remembering Lily doing the same thing as a girl. Harry practiced writing and came to the

conclusion he would only use a quill when required. His art steel nib pen was far superior. He named his owl Hedwig after a Saint in his History of Magic text.

Petunia spent her time reading the law books and the books about or that mentioned Harry. When she was done she made some phone calls and found a place not far from Diagon Alley where she could privately meet with the lawyers of Davies, Corner and Ogden on August 20th. Harry sent Hedwig to make an appointment with the optician in Diagon Alley and made arrangements to meet with Mr. Marcello at Ollivander's on the nineteenth of August to get his wand. Vernon surprised both of them by not saying a word and picking up take away on the days they got too engrossed in what they were reading to make dinner, apparently eighty-seven thousand pounds bought a lot of tolerance.

Life at Privet Drive was hectic not just because of the cramming Harry and Petunia were doing on the magical world, but also because they were trying to get two boys ready to head off to school. Dudley had been accepted to Vernon's old school Smeltings. Harry for the first time alongside Dudley got an entire wardrobe of new clothes, including many things he wasn't convinced he'd need. (three sets of capilene long underwear, polar fleece pants. Where did his Aunt think he was going? The arctic?) A large supply of school and personal supplies and much to his pleasure art supplies. Harry bought a set of wheels to attach to his trunk that could snap in and out of the mounts, and what he thought was the best school backpack that came in leather. Harry also bought a bridge pad, a cribbage board, a couple decks of cards and paperback copies of all his favorite books plus a few new ones. Last he bought a silver picture frame for the photo of him and his parents.

Dudley surprised Harry that night. "Harry could we talk?"

"Sure Dudley what do you need?"

"Do you think I can do this? I mean go to Smeltings be a success and such? I mean I've always had you to help me and I know that you are way smarter... I'm just..."

"Dudley who took your end of year exams?"

"I did."

"That's right you did, not me. Yes, I've helped you study since we were little, and I'm not saying that things probably won't be a bit harder for you. But you know how to study and you know the mechanics of how to learn. I'm sure you'll do fine and if you're really worried about it join a study group or ask for tutoring."

"Yeah, you're right. I can do this. But all the same I think, I'm actually going to miss you, you girl."

"All right that's it..." The resulting wrestling match had Petunia yelling at both of them while they fought to keep straight faces.

August 19th arrived and Harry and Petunia arrived early to the Leaky Cauldron. Tom let them through to the Alley. Their first stop was Ollivander's. Thaddeus Marcello was there and told them by way of greeting "Boy, that wand of yours had a mind of its own. Of course, I doubt that I'll ever experience such a thrill of accomplishment ever again, I'm actually considering retiring."

"Can I see it !" Harry sounded very much his age at that moment, causing all the adults to smile.

The wand maker extended it, handle first to him. It looked amazing the four woods swirled thirty two centimeters from the base to the tip in a coil, narrowing from a four centimeter diameter on the grip to centimeter at the tip. Each wood was edged by the woods of compatible elements. Where the grip began was a ring of silver inscribed with five runes small but smooth silver wires swirled and criss-crossed giving it a texture that would make hanging onto it easy, that continued twelve centimeters to the haft where Harry's aquamarine was held in place by another silver ring this one inscribed by six runes.

"First you must activate the runes, by putting a drop of blood on each. This will bind the wand to you so only you can use it."

Harry took the small knife Ollivander offered and frowned as he made a small cut on a finger of his left hand and did as directed.

"Magica sanguine excitari ligaveris. There it is finished, take your wand Harry."

Harry took it and couldn't resist giving it a wave. A veritable fountain of rainbow sparkles burst from it like champagne from a bottle.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Mr. Ollivander.

Mr. Marcello just got a very pleased look on his face before saying, "I hope you know how to take care of this wand young man. No carrying it around in your pocket or some such nonsense, and keep it clean. It was far to much work to create for you, not to take the best care of it. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. Where do I?"

"Ollie here carries holsters and wand care kits. My payment if you please."

Harry paid him the thirty four galleons he still owed. Then looked to Mr. Ollivander who said "Let's look at holsters shall we?" before waving goodbye to Mr. Marcello.

Half an hour later wand appropriately holstered and backpack dropped off for charming, Harry was at the optician's, while Petunia headed to Gringott's. Medi-witch Chang was a early twenty something witch who seemed thrilled to meet him.

"Harry Potter, in my shop! This is such an honor." she practically squealed.

Harry eyed her suspiciously "Yeah, I wanted to get some contacts. Unless there's some spell or potion that can fix my vision all together."

"Oh that's right you've grown up with Muggles. Let me explain your options. First: total correction, it involves both spells and potions and is very expensive two thousand five hundred galleons. And if your vision were to change it would have to be done over. That's one reason I don't recommend it for someone your age. Option two: glasses most people, 98 percent, go for this, most glasses are between three and five galleons. Third and it's something I've pioneered, is gradual correction. I took the muggle concept of contact lenses and adapted it. I put a lens that has been spelled to always maintain appropriate oxygenation and moisture in your eye, to self clean and to maintain whatever curvature is needed to give

you twenty twenty vision. Then you also have a course of drops to put in your eyes that over the course of, well for most of my patients who have tried it, which I admit is not many, in two years their vision was corrected to the point they no longer needed correction of any kind."

Harry wasn't sure how she could have said all that without taking a breath but he was sure she did. "Okay. If I go with option three how often do I take the lenses out for cleaning."

"You don't, I put them in and six months later you come back and I check your vision before I put a fresh pair in. The lenses have set ranges for correction."

"That sounds like what I want. How much is it going to cost? "

"Okay. Then let me cast a few diagnostic charms and we can get started. As for cost the contacts themselves are fifty five galleons the expensive part of this is the potion drops you'll use twice a day. Those are two hundred galleons per six months. " She paused and cast her charms before continuing. "The drops are what encourage your eyes to change to mimic the curvature of the lens they also help maintain the charms on the lenses. My goodness your eyes are quite bad aren't they. No wonder you want to be rid of your glasses you lose them and you're just about blind. My previous patients were nowhere near this bad instead of two years you are probably looking at...probably four."

"From my perspective that's still a bargain. But I'm going to Hogwarts on September 1st and I won't be back until next summer. How can we..?"

"I'll send a notice to Poppy Pomfrey she's the school's medi-witch. I have to anyway because of the eye drops. I'll just schedule to go to the school on or near the 19th of February."

Something occurred to Harry, "Medi-witch Chang?"

"Yes."

"I assume since you know about contacts that you know at least a bit about the muggle world?"

"Yes."

"I've got all my immunizations I need as a muggle but are there Magical illnesses I should get protected against?"

"Yes there are. I can refer you to a friend of mine at St. Mungo's he specializes in pediatrics."

"That probably would be a very good idea."

"Well let's take care of your eyes then we'll take care of that."

Meanwhile in Gringott's Petunia was asking lots of questions about Harry's properties and she was very furious to be told that the Godric's Hollow cottage had been sealed from entry and turned into a historic site. Especially since no reimbursement for doing so had been made to the estate.

"You mean to tell me that, you people just took valuable property from an orphan, who saved your collective behinds?"

"Not the goblins but the wizards ,yes."

"Someone is going to pay for that. Tell me did anyone even think to collect the valuables or personal mementos from the house before they sealed it?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"What about the manor? What sort of shape is it in? The beach house? The apartment building?" Petunia nearly wanted to scream when her first, second and then third question went unanswered.

"The apartment building has been maintained and the income invested separate from the main Potter money vault and the trust vault. It was refurbished two years ago to bring it up to current building codes."

"Well, I suppose that is something. What about taxes on all the properties and income or is my nephew going to owe some huge ridiculous amount in back taxes?"

"Taxes appropriate to both worlds have been paid on time. Gringott's takes care of that for most the wizarding world."

"That is a relief. I have to say, I have been pleased by the service you have provided Barchok. I hope your recommended solicitors do as well."

"Mrs. Dursley, if I may be so bold, what do you intend to do?"

"Well, there is the matter of recompense for the cottage and then there are all of the writers and publishers who have capitalizing on my nephew's name and misfortune and never once verifying their so called facts and never paying him a penny of the profits. Then there's the matter of my sister and her husband's wills. It is quite illegal to suppress such things in the muggle world, I knew my sister and am quite sure it would not have been her choice for me to raise my nephew. Whoever did that, must have disregarded quite a few laws in the name of blood wards to protect him, not to mention that whoever it was didn't bother to even ask but merely assumed and left him on my doorstep. By doing so they endangered my nephew's life.. Which leaves me with an appalling sense that someone powerful is trying to play me and my nephew like a violin. I want to change legal firms because it's patently obvious to me that the previous firm hasn't been doing its job of looking out for Harry's interests.

"Next on my agenda here today, is it possible for me to arrange to visit these properties especially the one in Godric's Hollow. Can you tell me where my sister and her husband were buried? I feel it would be appropriate for Harry to visit his parents graves before he heads off to school.

"Oh and I would like a detailed analysis of what the wards at my home do and do not do to protect my family. There was a problem for the owl delivering Harry's dress robes. When they didn't arrive as scheduled he sent his owl and discovered the problem. Also we've never received any mail from this bank and I don't believe it is the goblins doing. Barchok, I have to ask, I assume there are fees Harry's trust or family vault is paying for all this help you've been so graciously giving us."

"That would be correct and they should be appearing in the ledger I gave to Harry. But here is a sheet describing our services and the

fees. I did file the change in financial trustee without charging you, and the recommendations for the legal firm and medi-witch also cost you nothing. We at Gringott's owed you something for caring for Young Lord Potter despite the oversight of you not receiving your just stipend for his care. It should have been noticed after one year instead of going unnoticed altogether. But I took over as account manager to the Potters, three years after that time and the only thing I had to base my decisions on were the previous records."

"Very good. See you tomorrow?"

"I will be at the meeting to answer any financial questions. I should have at least a few details regarding Lord Potter's properties for you by then or I will know why not."

"Thank you. Harry should be done and there are things we need to do back in Surrey. Good day Barchok. Oh, one last thing I nearly forgot, Harry wanted to ask if he could get the family journals from the heirloom vault so he could read them."

Barchok found Harry's muggle aunt interesting, on the surface so much a human lady but underneath there was a certain ruthlessness that appealed to his goblin sensibilities. He wondered if the Boy-Who-Lived had learned any of it."I believe we could bring them out one at a time. Shall I bring one tomorrow?"

"That would be lovely. I believe he wanted to start with his grandfather's journal. Good day."

The next day Mr. Corner of the firm Davies, Corner and Ogden was by turns pleased (that representation of the BWL was moving to their firm), shocked (that the magical world had done what it had done to their hero without recompense), and appalled (that the BWL's previous law firm had done nothing about it). He was pleased that the paperwork to overturn the Wizengamot seal of the Potter wills was completed, and was impatiently looking forward to working with the firm's barrister to upset the status quo, not to mention the lovely paychecks that it would mean for everyone at his firm. If he figured it correctly when things were settled the young Lord might own a sizable portion of the magical world's publishers. This was going to push the firm to the top, for years Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent had used the fact that they represented both Dumbledore and the Boy-Who-Lived as their calling card. Barchok

of Gringott's was sending Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle, and Trent notice that their firm was being replaced, due to inadequate representation of the BWL, and had given him just what he needed to include them in false representation suit. All of it was enough to have any solicitor rubbing their hands in glee. Before he left the two hour meeting he shook hands with his first muggle client and declared it a pleasure to represent her and Lord Potter.

Chapter 5 A Visit to Godric's Hollow

After the solicitor left the meeting place Barchok gave Harry his grandfather's journal and then proceeded to tell them what he'd found out. "Lord Potter what I found out about your properties is this. The beach house is in good condition all eight of the Potter family elves reside there, while the house is in good condition the elves are not. House elves are dependent on the bond they have with their owner for good health. And while Harry here is alive he has been locked away from the elves' access which has been bad for them. Apparently there used to be six more but their whereabouts are currently unknown. Which is too bad really as they were the younger and stronger elves. Potter Manse in Staffordshire was apparently destroyed in the Death Eater attack that killed Lord Potter's grandparents and spurred his father into becoming an auror instead of a quidditch player. It was being rebuilt larger and with better wards when your parents were killed. While the outer building is complete it is by no means ready for human habitation. The cottage in Godric's Hollow was severely damaged in You-Know-

"Call him by his proper name, because that's all it is, Barchok a name; the rest is all nonsense ." Harry growled.

The goblins eyebrows raised then came together. "Voldemort's attack. My information is Albus Dumbledore was first on the scene and sealed it himself. Making it so only he and those he approved could get in. He turned it over as a historic site two years later. There is a memorial marker. And last, Lord Potter's parents are buried in the graveyard in Godric's Hollow."

"So what now?" Harry asked.

Barchok extended a small ragged looking belt. "I take you to your homes."

Harry watched as his Aunt got a very pinched look on her face. She hated magic and it was patently obvious that this belt was magic of the highest sort. She had been so good during his two Diagon Alley trips she had even signed the forms so he could get a magical physical done, but this... "It's alright Aunt Petunia, you don't have to." Harry tried to control his disappointment he'd wanted to see the homes that were his.

Petunia had worked so hard to conceal her distaste for the magical. She had thought while meeting Barchok, he's just a slightly deformed little person, I can do this. And she had. In Diagon Alley she had focused on Harry or where she placed her feet not on what was going on around her. The Gringott's cart was merely a rollercoaster. It had been easy to conceal her distaste for the clothing of the wizarding world, after all she had to regularly hide her opinions of how women she met while she entertained for Vernon dressed. And for today's meeting she hadn't even had to go into the Alley. But this, this was something different this would be magic affecting her.

"Mrs. Dursley?" Barchok asked.

"Just take my nephew. I'll wait here, and order some tea."

Harry took hold of the belt, after a moment's confusion Barchok said "Activate one."

Harry felt as if a giant fishhook had slammed through his navel and the world started spinning much faster than it already did. Then he felt as though he was falling then as if he hit the ground with great force. Which he did. "What was that?"

"A portkey."

"Where are we?"

"Bristol, elves are valuable property. Yours are languishing. They need to properly bond with you before they sicken and die. Hence my bringing you here first."

"You mean elves are like slaves?"

"In a sense yes, in another no. You own them and are their master and they will stay with you regardless of how you treat them unless you give them clothes. But it is more of a symbiotic relationship. Do you understand this word?"

"A symbiotic relationship is one where both sides get something they need from the relationship."

"Yes as a wizard you get their service. They keep house, tend grounds, that sort of thing. They get to draw on your magic, you provide them with purpose, garments and food to eat. The amount even a hundred elves takes would be so small you never notice it but it is what gives them life. Setting them free is a death sentence most freed elves die within five years if not less; many take up drinking to numb the pain caused by the absence of the bond. Elves are trustworthy they keep their master's secrets. Owning a house elf can be rewarding for both parties. Come we are just outside the wards. We go through that gate and we are on your property."

The moment they crossed the wards eight beings two thirds Harry's size popped into being around them. "MASTER! Master is being here! Oh Happy, happy, happy day! Master has come!"

Harry was slightly taken aback by the eight green skinned creatures with tennis ball size eyes, but he knew these creatures lives depended on him so he shyly said. "Hello." All of them seemed to want to touch him as if to reassure themselves he was really here.

After several moments the oldest one said "Enough, I is Libby oldest house elf and housekeeper. It is so good see you master, it has been so hard." On the last phrase her eyes started to swim with tears.

"It's nice to meet you too Libby." The tears started to flood over Harry wondered what he had said wrong as the elf started to cry in earnest. "No, don't do that. I'm sorry I don't want you to cry."

"Sorry Master, but Libby is just being so happy, Little Master is kind just like Mistress Lily would have wanted." She wiped her eyes with the edge of the pillowcase she was wearing. She sniffed long and hard. Then said, "This is Zinnia she is been cook, Rudy is chief gardner, Bob is being his helper. Melvin is repair and maintenance elf. Taffy is laundry elf. Becky and Rose is being maids. We is keeping all Potter homes we allowed in, in best condition we can."

"What do you mean?"

"We is not allowed into Dowager Cottage in Godric's Hollow not for long, long time. Nasty old bugger man not allow us, he try to confine us here after Old Master died. He bound us to Potter properties so we couldn't search for little Master. He gives us two choices be

bound or goes with him. There is not being enough magic and work so Sid, Wibbly, Gary, Penny, Mitzy, and Fara left with him but they still Potter elves. Unfortunately there is not much work at Potter Manse, it is not being finished. And we is taking care of the Loft. That is where Potter family paintings is being kept, it is so sad that there is no painting of Masters parents but that is way life is."

"Barchok told me I need to properly bond with you so you don't get sick. How do I..."

Libby took his hand and placed it on her head "I is accepting you as my master. Now you say I accept you as my elf."

"I accept you as my elf." Harry didn't expect for there to be a difference and felt ridiculous saying the words, but to his astonishment Libby seemed both younger and brighter afterward.

"Master is being so strong!"

The other elves quickly surged forward to do their own bonding with him. After which he finally got a chance to really observe his surroundings. The house was on a rise overlooking the sea. It had a garden like he knew his Aunt would love before a short picket fence with a gate that opened onto a path that led to a beach. The elves excitedly led him on a tour of the house. He could tell this was meant to be a vacation house it was two stories and the entry opened onto a great room there were stairs leading up to both sides of the upper story. Up the stairs were large almost dormitory style rooms. The elves excitedly showed him how Mistress Lily had improved the upper story by adding bathrooms to both sides. One side on the ground floor held a large kitchen and dining area that could easily seat twenty and a small library. In the library there were filled shelves and crates filled with books.

"Libby what, I mean why the crates?"

"Those is books saved from the manse library. Master Charlus should have upgraded the wards when nasty wizard first started to make trouble but didn't think he'd be a target cause of his age thought he not be a threat. Nasty Wizard come and kill Master Charlus and Mistress Dory. Made Master James very sad, he was away at Hogwarts at time. We elves managed to save much but not all, books and paintings, other treasures most are in Heirloom vault.

Wish we able to save Master and Mistress but those that tried, died. Much sadness for elves. Used to be twice as many Potter elves My mate order me and elves left to take what we could and go so Master James has something and not loose all. Sad time for elves."

She shook herself from her reverie and quickly showed Harry the rest of the house. The other side of the ground floor held a master suite, two guest suites all with ensuite bathrooms and a powder room. Barchok indicated the needed to move on so Harry reluctantly took hold of the belt.

"This time Lord Potter try to relax and stand with soft knees let the portkey move you rather than moving yourself when you feel yourself slow take a step or two . The hook is a shock but if you don't fight it it is easier."

"Right easier." Harry muttered to himself.

"Activate two."

Harry tried to relax and did a little better. Instead of lying on the ground feeling like he'd been smashed there he was only on his hands and knees. Here he looked at the small manor in front of him and said. "We're in Staffordshire."

Barchok nodded. "This is the manse I was able to bring you through the wards because they haven't been shifted from Gringott's control since we were doing the rebuilding back to yours yet. The elves have done well the farms surrounding the manor have paid the taxes each year and provided the elves with sustenance. You own the manse and basically all property in all directions for two miles. We need to be swift as there isn't much to see."

Harry took Barchoks advice and walked quickly through the manor it was easy to see why it wasn't fit for human habitation yet. Although some plumbing and to Harry's surprise some wiring was in place only the load bearing walls were in place and there were no fixtures, no faucets, no sinks or tubs and most importantly no toilets.

He said, "I'm done."

A moment later he was in a furnished apartment looking out on a magnificent view of the Thames not far from Westminster bridge. "We're at the apartment building?"

"Yes, top floor it's actually warded from muggles they believe the building is a story shorter than it is. This apartment being reserved for Potter family use."

"Cool." Then he noticed the apartment had a bit of an appearance of an antique store, with many items he knew from his shopping trips with Petunia were antiques stacked next to and in some cases on top of each other. He quickly looked for and found the loo. After making use of it he looked around a bit more. He came to the conclusion the elves must have used the apartment for storage as they had the library in the vacation cottage. "I'm ready."

Barchok extended the belt again. This time they appeared next to a statue in what appeared to be the town square. Harry looked at the statue and realized it was supposed to be his parents. Barchok guided him over to see the ruined cottage. Part of Harry was surprised he had survived to be pulled out of the ruins of the house, but supposed that it had probably settled some in the last nine almost ten years. After looking at it wishing he could go inside and see if he could find some mementos of his parents. Harry nodded to Barchok who then lead him to a graveyard.

Harry didn't know what he expected as he stood in front of his parents headstone. Reading their names and birth and death dates, he thought he'd feel something but he felt a strange numbness instead. From his parent's letters and the photograph he knew they had loved him as a baby, but he was no longer that baby. So where did that leave him?

Harry put that worrisome question to the side for now, he didn't know enough about either of them besides the few things he had heard from people and that was sure to be biased. He felt like he should say something to make up for the lack of feelings. "Mum, Dad, I'm here for the first time, I don't know what happened the night you died but I'm pretty sure nothing went like you wanted. For one Aunt Petunia raised me, and Dad, I have never met any of your friends. But Mum for all your worries about Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon they did a decent job. I'm about to head off to Hogwarts for

my first year, so I don't know how that's going to go on, but one thing is for sure. Me and the headmaster are not going to get along."

"I'll come again next year. Maybe I'll remember to bring flowers next time." Harry turned and walked back over to Barchok. "I'm done."

Chapter 6 Aboard the Hogwarts Express

The morning of September 1st, Harry made breakfast while Petunia made lunches as was common. Petunia tucked a some scones into his lunch kit and then set a large thermos of tea with two cups attached on the counter next to it, in addition to the bottle of water and juice box Harry had already set aside. At his questioning glance she said, "I'll explain later." The family had a quiet breakfast, Petunia got the car keys and she watched as Harry packed the last loose items from his room in his trunk. Harry took the photo of his parents from the desk and was about to tuck it into his trunk when his aunt asked, "What is that?" without a word Harry handed it to her.

Petunia examined the picture in its silver frame. It reminded her of a family picture session she and Vernon had had with Dudley when he was a baby. It also reminded her of a similar moment between herself and Lily when Lily was a baby. She sighed "Lily" almost under her breath.

Harry opened the window and took Hedwig from her perch. "Go to Hogwarts girl. I'll see you there." He cleaned her perch and threw away the litter that sat it the tray under it. Then he tucked it into his trunks third compartment. His room now looked unoccupied.

Petunia reluctantly handed the picture back to Harry. "You're very like her you know. Outwardly you're like your father but deep down you have her heart and mind." Harry took the photo back and tucked it in his trunk. He swallowed.

"Will you be coming back for Christmas? It will be at Marge's."

Harry shook his head no.

"Easter?"

"Probably not. I think I'll want to stay and study."

"This will still be your home, and I think Dudley will miss you."

"I know, but you and I both know Uncle Vernon won't. It's better I'm only here for the summer break from now on."

Petunia reluctantly nodded. It was odd, there was a heavy feeling in her chest she couldn't describe. "Let's go."

They loaded the car. Half way to London, Petunia couldn't handle the silence. Normally silence was the normal state of things between her and Harry, all their previous trips to London had been silent.

"Your mother was so excited to go to Hogwarts, she couldn't sit still. When she came back her stories were so fantastic I got horribly jealous. I wanted to see and live in a castle. It didn't help Lily was always everything I wanted to be smart beautiful, talented. She even got to marry a lord. That was always one of my childhood dreams.

"Her stories included that once winter hit the castle was cold, so cold she suffered from chilblains until an upper year took pity on her and taught her a warming charm...She talked about the train and the candy on the trolley. You and I both know that between your sensei and I, you aren't fond of sweets so I sent the three orange currant scones with clotted cream and tea to tide you over until the feast at school. The thermos with extra cups is in case you make some friends...Write let me know how things are. If you need something let me know." She pulled into Kings Cross. "Alright your ticket, does it say which platform? I remember it was between platforms but I don't remember which ones."

"Nine and three quarters."

"So between nine and ten. Forty-five minutes. Do you want to wait on this side or just go through?"

"I'll go through."

"Alright Harry, good luck." Petunia shocked herself and him by giving him a brief hug. "You walk through the wall between the platforms as if it isn't there. Do write." She watched as he disappeared then turned and left the station.

Harry thought he would remember that brief hug always. He did as he was told and soon found himself beside a scarlet steam engine with the excitement his Aunt mentioned his mum feeling, rising like the tide. He climbed a board and stowed his trunk. He sat by the window and observed the students arriving. Some arrived out of nowhere hanging onto a parent further down; that was apparition

according to the books for the muggleborn. Many others seemed to arrive out of a fireplace on the platform not far from where he was sitting. Flooing. Still others came through from King's Cross. At twenty until eleven he noticed a stately older witch with a large red handbag a long green dress and a tall hat with a vulture on it, come through the fireplace. She was shortly followed by a chubby blond boy that looked to about his age and slightly distressed. "Come along, Neville. I don't have all day."

"Sorry Gran, I just wanted to keep a good hold on Trevor as we went through the floo."

"Yes, yes, of course although honestly, what was your grand-uncle thinking, a toad. You can barely take care of yourself. Here I've unshrunk your trunk. Have a good term and do nothing to disgrace the family. Study hard and mind your manners if Minerva has to send me one bad report..."

Harry decided that he didn't like the old witch very much. She treated her grandson the way Vernon used to treat him. Harry knew from his sensei that the best way to get the best from others was to treat them with respect. Usually the kids who made fun of his second hand clothes stopped when he didn't seem to let it bother him and still treated them with the respect sensei demanded in the dojo. Some of them even came to respect him in return. Of course it didn't hurt that they knew that he knew how to hand them their asses in a fight situation. Thinking about his sensei made him think about their goodbye.

Mid August Harry had knocked on Sensei's office door. He'd opened it. Harry had bowed respectfully.

"Yes Harry, did you need something?"

"Sir, I've been accepted to the boarding school my parents went to in Scotland and I wanted to give you notice so you could find someone to help clean the dojo and help with the Saturday classes."

"I see thank you Harry. How do you feel about this?"

"It's an opportunity I won't get if I stay here, sir."

"Is that all?"

Harry's demeanor changed. "No, part of me is terrified I'll do something to screw up, and ..."

Harry's sensei had long ago figured out that Harry stayed on a sufferance from his Aunt and Uncle. They provided for the boy's needs and a smidgen more Harry's presence in his dojo was proof of that, but no more. Love, affection and praise were a rare if not nonexistent things in Harry's home life. But they also did not abuse him in a tangible way; the worst they were guilty of was emotional neglect. Sensei tried to make up for this lack by offering Harry additional classes in exchange for work and lavishing the boy with well earned praise and doing his best to provide a moral compass. The result was Harry sometimes confided in him.

"Is this a good thing or a bad thing?"

"Good, I think, I've already found out a little about my parents I didn't know before. I get to..

"Get to what?"

"Get away from my Uncle. Get away from the constant calculation the ever on alert. But I'll miss you and the dojo."

"Life is about change Harry, it sounds like this might indeed be a good thing." Sensei had seen enough interaction between Harry and his family not to need an explanation. "Embrace it. Will you be back for Michaelmas and Easter breaks?"

"No Sir I'll probably stay at school."

"Then I'll teach you some new katas and exercises with your bo and a bokken to practice until we see each other next summer." The day before Harry's departure Sensei had gifted him with a new larger Gi, a bo, a bokken of his own, books about tai chi and kendo, and the admonishment to practice hard everyday and take care of himself. Harry wound up carrying the staff but the bokken tucked nicely into one of the sets of loops in his trunk's third compartment.

A knock sounded from the door of the compartment. The chubby blond boy from outside was at the door. "Mind if I ?"

"Sure."

"Thanks I'm Neville Longbottom. You are?"

"Harry Potter. So you're my god brother."

"God brother?"

"Well what else does the wizarding world call it when the mother of one boy is the godmother of the other and vice versa. That is assuming your mother's name is Alice."

The boy got a very sad look on his face. "Yes, my Mum is Alice, I'm sorry I never knew. Mum hasn't been well for a...well since I was a baby and my Gran raised me. I'd always wondered who my godparents were...and why they weren't around, but if it was your parents it makes sense now."

"Sorry, If I brought up bad memories or anything. Here let me help you with that." Harry knew with his healthy fit body he would be much more able to maneuver Neville's trunk, than the chubby boy. As he'd watched the platform he had noticed a general trend of wizarding kind to be unfit. "Anyway it's nice to meet you, Neville. I hope we can be friends." Harry held out his hand.

"I'd like that Harry." Neville took in the boy in front of him. He was dressed neatly in muggle clothes in shades of blue and gray, and wore a gray fedora so his scar wasn't readily apparent.

"So I heard you grew up with Muggles. What was that like?"

"It was okay. Different than growing up with magic I bet. My family never liked it when I did accidental magic. I bet your family liked it when you did it."

"Yeah." Neville said in a very subdued tone.

Harry could tell he obviously said something wrong so decided to set the tone for this new friendship. "Okay, obviously I said something wrong and rather than wreck this new friendship with a misunderstanding, how about you tell me, so I don't do it again."

Neville swallowed nervously. "I didn't do accidental magic for a long time. My family thought I was a squib. It wasn't until my Uncle Algie held me out the third story window and dropped me and I bounced that I did any magic at all."

"That's ruddy awful, why didn't anyone stop him? He could have killed you."

"Welcome to the magical world where it's better to be dead than a squib." Neville spoke without thinking then got a shocked look on his own face then covered his own mouth in his shock. A moment later he put his hand down and while still blushing he said. "Don't tell anyone I said that. Gran would... Uncle Algie isn't all bad. He was really pleased I got into Hogwarts, he bought me my toad."

Harry refrained from commenting, remembering what Hagrid had to say about toads.

A second later a knock came from the door. A bushy haired brunette stood at there. "Do you mind if I join you?" She smiled and showed prominent front teeth.

Harry arched an eyebrow at Neville in question. He had never had much to do with the girls at school. They had preferred to make fun of his clothes and messy hair, not that this girl would have any room to do so given her own bush. He had been more into advancing in kenpo, drawing, staying near the top of the class and out of the way of the school bullies Malcom MacDonald and Piers Polkiss than into the girls.

Neville shrugged and said, "Sure."

"I'm Hermione Granger." she extended her hand.

Neville looked shocked for a second. Harry pegged the girl as Muggleborn and extended his own. One of the things the etiquette book his Aunt got him, mentioned that Witches didn't extend their hands to shake, that proper behavior dictated the wizard extend his hand and if the witch allowed, it he was to kiss the back of the witch's hand like someone out of Victorian times. "I'm Harry Potter."

"Are you really?"

"Last time I checked."

"I know all about you of course-."

"Oh? Somehow I doubt that. Given that I've never given an interview and I have read what was written about me, I can tell you none of it was true. Except maybe some about what happened when I was a baby." Harry had determined that anyone who claimed to know him that had "read" all about him, was not high on his list of potential friends. He wasn't completely saying no way just not likely. He shook the hand she'd extended.

Hermione got a very abashed look on her face. "None of it's true? Then how dare they print it?"

"I ask the same question, but I expect money had something to do with it." Harry said in a subtly sarcastic tone. "Neville may I present Miss Hermione Granger, muggleborn witch and fellow future student. Miss Granger, Mr. Neville Longbottom."

This time Neville extended his hand and Miss Granger took it. She was surprised when Neville lifted her hand and lightly kissed the back as tradition dictated. Harry fought the urge to snicker at her surprised look. Find out all about magic indeed, she had probably focused on reading her school books and history not on culture and laws the way Petunia had him do. All of them startled when they felt the initial lurch of the train leaving the station.

"So are you both as excited as I am to go to Hogwarts, it's supposed to be the best magical school there is. It was such a surprise when I got my letter, but once I understood I was so pleased of course. Have you done any spells? I have, just a few simple ones but they've all worked."

"Miss Granger are you aware that you broke the law?" Harry asked he really didn't want to listen to this all the way to Hogwarts.

"I did?" she bleated.

" Yes it's the decree of the reasonable restriction of underage sorcery. People under seventeen are not allowed to do magic unless it is to save their life when not at school." Harry said.

"I didn't know that." she half wailed. "It wasn't in any of our textbooks or in the histories I read. I mean I practically memorized our books...Are you sure? It would be awful to be expelled the moment I got to school."

Neville spoke up to soothe her. "Harry's right such a law exists. But I think they make allowances for children who haven't been to school yet because our control of our magic is pretty erratic. And there are ways around the rules as well."

Hermione was quiet after that at least for awhile. Harry appreciated the silence while it lasted. He pulled out Magical Theory and started reading and making notes in the margins using a mechanical pencil.

"You shouldn't do that."

"What?"

"Write in books."

"You shouldn't be so bossy. A, it's part of how I study and b, it's my book I bought it and I can write in it if I please. Honestly. Do you have the sense God gave a goose?"

Hermione got another chagrined look on her face, and went quiet again.

Neville sat, not comfortable with the situation but unsure of how to change it. He could see that Hermione had certain notions of how things should be. Harry was challenging those notions starting when he said the books lied for money, continuing on when he pointed out Hermione obviously didn't know everything since she hadn't known about the restriction on underage magic, and now his saying he could do as he liked with his things. All of which were true. "So Hermione in your reading did you find out how we are sorted?"

"No, I hope I get into Gryffindor. I heard that Dumbledore himself was in it, but I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn't be too bad..."

Harry mentally made note of the fact Dumbledore had been in Gryffindor. Hagrid had been extolling the virtues of that house over the others and had given Harry an outright warning away from Slytherin which probably meant Gryffindor was where Dumbledore

wanted him to go. Thwarting the plans of that man was a large part of who he intended to be, but he had every intention to do it in such ways that if the old man objected he would look the fool hence Harry's efforts to know the rules inside and out before stepping into enemy territory. After all as Sun Tzu said, the highest form of generalship is to balk the enemy's plans.

"What about you both, where do you think you'll be sorted?"

"Does it matter?" was Harry's sardonic reply.

Harry's reply overlapped with Neville's dismal, "I'll probably be in Hufflepuff." Things got quiet again until seemingly in unison all three children's stomachs rumbled and they all reached in to various bags /boxes and pulled out lunch. Harry's was sandwiches, Petunia had made not only a roast beef and cheddar with lettuce and tomato, but also two cucumber sandwiches that were Harry's favorite, she had included a bag of crisps, some celery and carrot sticks and a pear. Neville had a picnic basket that had a spill proof tureen of a beef, barley and vegetable soup, some Cornish pasties, and an apple and some biscuits for dessert. Hermione had a large salad, a muenster cheese sandwich and an orange. As each of them thought the others lunches looked delicious they all decided to share, and they used the cups on Harry's thermos for the soup. As they shared they asked questions about each others pre-Hogwarts school experiences.

Neville had been home schooled as was common in the wizarding world and he was really looking forward to Herbology.

Hermione had gone to an all girls junior academy after infant school but hadn't had friends between being the smartest person in the school and her occasional bursts of accidental magic. She wasn't sure which class sounded the most interesting but she was sure she would miss her literature class and foreign language classes.

Harry was quick to state he had attended a public primary school where he had done well academically but had been average in most other ways. He had looked at all the classes and was looking forward to Potions as he felt it was a combination of cooking and chemistry both of which he had enjoyed when he was in primary school.

Midway through lunch the blond bigot from Diagon Alley opened their compartment. He was flanked by two large hulking bodyguard type boys. "Honestly Longbottom, one would think to have more pride, two mudbloods. A pureblood like yourself should think of what you owe the family name. But then again an almost squib like yourself can't be choosy I suppose. Come on Crabbe, Goyle, Potter is somewhere on this train supposedly let's go find him." Then he left.

"Who was that? And what did he mean calling us Mudbloods?" Hermione asked.

"That was Draco Malfoy..." Neville stopped too embarrassed to continue.

Harry took it on himself to explain. "You see Hermione there are certain factions in magical society that feel anyone who comes from...non magical roots, are inferior. Mudblood is an extremely derogatory term for muggleborn wizards or witches. I am technically a half blood because my mother was muggleborn as you are. Malfoy, the prick and probable member of a family in one of those factions, saw me with my muggle aunt who raised me in Diagon Alley and made the assumption I was muggleborn. It's all a crock of... My mum left me a letter stating she thinks that some of those families have problems with the consequences of inbreeding, mental retardation, insanity, and declining magic levels. My family the Potters, in general marry muggle every five generations and have no such problems."

"Mine too, in fact mine is just about due. I won't be marrying a pureblood. If not muggleborn I'll at least marry a half blood." Neville stated.

"How positively...gothic. Professor McGonagall didn't say anything about this."

"Of course not. The magical world lives in secrecy. Muggleborn witches and wizards are brought into this secret society to maintain that secrecy. I could be wrong but I would bet that any muggleborn that doesn't choose to come gets their powers bound and memories wiped. I would also bet that a compulsion is put on the families of muggleborn students so they can't talk about magic to anyone not in on the secret."

"But that's..That's horrible."

"Yes but that hasn't stopped the magical world from regularly producing people like Hitler, I mean just in the last half century Voldemort," Harry paused when Neville squeaked before continuing, "Grindelwald. Magic isn't all hearts and flowers, wave a wand and everything is wonderful."

Neville looked around, "Where's Trevor?"

"Trevor?" Hermione asked.

"My toad!"

"Relax Nev," Harry said. "We'll help you look. He probably got out when Malfoy came by."

"Maybe we should get into our robes first so people will know we're first years." Hermione stated.

"Works for me."

Neville nodded they stepped out long enough for Hermione to change, then she waited while they did. They had only searched a few compartments when Harry decided there had to be a better way. Hogwarts: A History had mentioned student leaders in each house that wore a badge with a P on it. Harry helped continue the search until they reached a compartment where a person was wearing such a badge. "Could you help us? Is there a spell or something that you could use to help us find Neville's toad?"

The prefect whose robes were trimmed in green and silver looked amused. "What do you know a firstie with the ability to apply magical solutions to problems."

"Leave them alone Marcus." A girl wearing blue and bronze trimmed robes said.

"Aw Sandra, I'm just having a little fun."

"Marcus Aurelius Flint, Aunt Eleanor will kill you if you do anything that might cost you that prefect badge. You wouldn't have it now if

Benton MacNair hadn't been so stupid with it last year and gotten himself expelled."

"Easy cousin. I'll help them. Yes there's a spell it's called "Accio" then what ever it is you wish to summon. With a wand movement similar to gathering something into your arms the tricky part is if it's something alive or breakable to be careful to visualize that thing coming without hitting anything or squashing it. Care to try it?" he asked fully expecting them to refuse.

"But what about the restriction?" Harry asked.

"Once you're on the train it no longer applies."

Marcus looked at Neville. Neville shook his head no, then at Hermione.

She looked at Neville a moment then reluctantly shook her head no.

He looked at Harry; Harry itched to try it. After a look at Neville, Harry nodded.

Marcus smiled he doubted a firstie could do the spell. His cousin Cassandra Yaxley frowned at him.

Harry said "ashio" to confirm the spell.

Marcus corrected Harry's pronunciation.

Harry nodded and pulled out his wand. He closed his eyes took a breath to find his center. He pictured clearly the toad Neville had arrived in the compartment with then the toad floating safely from where ever he was into his hands. "Accio, Trevor the toad."

A moment later he was rewarded by Trevor floating through the door.

"Oh my goodness Harry you did it!" Hermione exclaimed.

Harry grinning handed the toad to Neville. Then He turned to the prefect. "Thank you very much for your help. I couldn't have done it without you." Then he and his two companions returned to their compartment.

Marcus Flint and his cousin sat there stunned. Slytherin prefect, captain of Slytherin quidditch, and sixth year Marcus regarded himself as very able with magic. A firstie had just done a fourth year charm. Flint shook himself free of the shock. "I hope that firstie gets sorted into Slytherin. That kind of focus and control would be so good."

Cassandra Yaxley was the oldest of four Yaxley children born to the current head of house, she was also a borderline squib and knew it. Most of her family shunned her as if being an almost squib was catching. The exceptions were Marcus and her much younger cousin Aaron both of whom were in Slytherin. She was in her seventh year in Ravenclaw because she was smart and liked research. But she would be the first to admit, if her theory wasn't tip top she would have failed her owls. And most families of her father's acquaintance wouldn't consider her as a wife for their sons because she barely got in to Hogwarts and her OWL practicals in the subjects requiring magic (Transfiguration, Charms, DADA) had been P's her theory had been outstanding giving her acceptable overall. Her Potions and history OWLs had been acceptable as well. She was taking NEWTs in Arithmancy, Herbology, Astronomy, and to her fathers absolute fury Muggle Studies for they were the only classes she had gotten exceeds expectations or better in. She wondered what she would do at the end of the school year, but right now there was a larger puzzle to solve. "She called him Harry, you don't suppose?"

"It's possible. It's hard to tell with his hat on. Father asked me to report on his activities. I declined saying that would be like making war on children. He told me I could hold to my scruples for now but a day would come when he would expect obedience."

"Don't they all." Cassandra knew that as a borderline squib her future was anything but pleasant. Cassandra had noticed something else that she somehow doubted her cousin had. Most magic users took their wand and the wands of others for granted, seldom did they actually notice the wand another wizard used. Harry's wand was clearly a custom wand. Ninety-nine percent of magic users would never consider the expense that getting a custom made wand brought. Yet here was a mere firstie with a custom wand. That meant one of two things either he was showing off or his magic was very unique. Given what he had just done she leaned towards the later.

Back in the compartment with Neville, Hermione and Harry. The trolley came by, Harry on Neville's recommendation got a couple of Chocolate frogs paying about ten knuts. They all settled in to read their school books.

Harry so he could be prepared.

Neville because he thought maybe studying would help convince himself he was meant to be there.

Hermione studied because she was afraid she would put a foot wrong with Harry and get slammed again. Her father had warned her that reality was not necessarily found between the pages of books and she should be careful of believing it did. Her mother was like her, she lived and breathed books, and had always overruled her father. But maybe, just maybe her father was right this time.

A half hour before they figured they would reach Hogsmeade, Harry pulled out the tea and scones Aunt Petunia sent with him and he shared with the other two. Then the train pulled into Hogsmeade station. Their year at Hogwarts was about to begin.

Chapter 7 Sorting Not According to Plan

Albus Dumbledore was feeling quite happy as he sucked on a lemon sherbet at the Head Table. Hagrid told him that the boy who lived was healthy, respectful, and seemed smart. That his aunt and uncle had done well by him which was good. Hopefully they hadn't spoiled him much, Albus was relieved they hadn't lived down to Minerva's expectations. He'd have been hard pressed to face his deputy if she found out he had by passed her guardianship, and they had. Not that Albus couldn't have worked that into his plans. He was anxious to see the boy himself but didn't want to draw too much attention to him yet.

He had been mildly concerned when Ollie had written and said there was some difficulty with the boy's wand. Even the Holly wand with a phoenix feather from Fawkes had not matched. Ollie had of course sorted it out. Albus figured that when Severus saw the custom wand he would put it down to Albus spoiling Harry instead of the necessity it was. He would have to keep a sharp eye on things. The stone being in the castle was sure to draw undesirable attention. But he needed a mysterious challenge to test the boy, how better than to hide the stone in a trapped maze in the school. He hoped that the boy had as much courage as his father and as much heart as his mother. He supposed he would find out as Minerva led the first years in.

He listened to the names and houses as they were called. Bones no surprise there. Goldstein he would have thought Hufflepuff. Ah, how nice Neville Longbottom in Gryffindor. Malfoy in Slytherin big surprise, not. Now finally the name he'd been waiting for Harry Potter. Why was the hat taking so long, it shouldn't take long. The boy was meant for Gryffindor and surely Molly had met him and helped him at the station. It was so fortunate Hagrid forgot that tidbit of information. Thereby allowing more influencing of the boy further towards Gryffindor. Albus had the measure of Ron Weasley and he was relatively sure that the boy would cozy up to Harry and influence him still further towards Gryffindor.

Meanwhile under the Sorting Hat. Harry and the Hat were having quite the discussion.

"Slytherin" Harry ordered the hat.

"Are you out of your mind young fellow? Slytherin is for people who want to prove something, and are usually willing to play fast and loose with the rules to do it. You understand manipulation and calculation. I must admit you are quite accomplished at it, you understand planning but you also have a moral code, most children there while totally loyal to certain ideals are not attached to law abiding behavior. No you are far better suited for Gry-"

"Put me in Gryffindor, and I swear you'll be in too many pieces to sort another student."

"Not Gryffindor hmm...You are a puzzle. Slytherin huh? Why? You could have so much more influence from Gryffindor. You are cunning I'll grant, quite the planner and not afraid to manipulate others, but you have such a determined moral code and I sense no strong desire to prove yourself. Not to mention all the enemies you'll have in Slytherin. I'm sorry I just don't see it. Hufflepuff, maybe? You are totally loyal to those you trust few though they are, no stranger to hard work, and unafraid to make friends... But you are not eager to trust and, therefore are no Hufflepuff... Not to mention with your determination to win and fierceness....I suppose you would eat them alive. Hmm... You are as intelligent as your mother, and have a mind Rowena herself would gladly claim... But Ravenclaw isn't right for you, you would terrify them. Too practical, and physical by half... Surely you see you have courage in such abundance, you are brave enough to combat even those you fear, and you are already a warrior at heart. Such a sense of right and wrong... Godric would be thrilled to have one such as you. It really is the best-"

"Not Gryffindor." Harry growled.

"Why not?"

"I am here because I have been given no choice. Almost my whole life has been living as others have chosen for me. They don't care if I am happy nor unhappy. Any happiness I have had came in stolen increments. My Aunt too has been denied that which would have made her happy. I'm not happy to be a puppet. By the same token neither am I unhappy to be here, because here I will have opportunities I don't have at my relatives. You say I am both brave and cunning, then let me be cunning enough and brave enough to thwart those that would control me. Slytherin."

"You do not want to be controlled by others, and I suppose you do lack the usual hardheaded plough ahead idiocy. But if I am to place you elsewhere you must show me what it is you want. I see... but the scope is so simple. You merely wish to have a happy, simple life and have love. That's not ambitious it's actually rather Hufflepuffish of you. I really can't see Slytherin as being the place for you. You are confident in yourself but not stupidly so; Slytherin house is marked by those seeking to prove themselves. Besides you already despise many of your potential housemates."

"Granted. But it is ambitious to want a simple life, when you have someone like Albus Dumbledore attempting to steer you into some grand, glorious, predetermined destiny. Glorious destinies in books inevitable lead to grand funerals so no thank you. Any house but Slytherin, and he will have grounds on which to maneuver."

"You have a point. And you do have a by stick or by carrot determination to win that won't quit. Not Gryffindor hmm, disappointing, but I guess it can be SLYTHERIN!"

In the silence that followed that pronouncement, it would have been possible to hear a pin drop.

Minerva was crushed the child of two of her all-time favorite students wouldn't be in her house. Severus Snape who had been sipping from his goblet sprayed wine across the table. Albus Dumbledore lost his famous twinkle and just blinked in shock. Harry removed the hat from his head and moved through the silence to the Slytherin table. The rest of the sorting happened in relative quiet as everyone tried to absorb that the Boy-Who-Lived was in Slytherin.

Harry started off the year using the map to learn his way around. He rapidly grew to appreciate it even more, as it allowed him to mostly avoid his fellow students. Harry was as used to poor treatment from others, but if he'd have been dark like so many of his schoolmates called him he probably would have committed violence by now. For some reason almost everyone took offense at his control was greater than their provocation so far. Someone had been pranking him since the second day of term. Given the red and gold he was sometimes turned he assumed it was some Gryffindors. And it wasn't just the other houses, no, even the students that were his housemates occasionally shoved him and called him names. Slytherin House had semi private rooms. Theodore Nott who was

supposed to be his roommate had moved in with Blaise Zabini and Gregory Goyle because he didn't want to share with a halfblood or so he claimed. Harry knew he wasn't the only halfblood in the house so he figured it had more to do with the fact that Harry was the Boy-Who-Lived than anything else. Harry just shrugged and kept to his room in the hours he was required to be in the dorm.

Hedwig helped, he had no idea how but she had somehow found a way from the owlery to his room in the Slytherin dorms. As Harry looked at Hedwig, he couldn't figure out how she did it. She got to the dungeons every single day, no one let her in. Harry had finally pulled her perch from his trunk so she had a place in their room and supposed it was just as well that Theodore Nott refused to stay in the same room with him since owls were supposed to stay in the owlery. Taking her from the dorm back outside had become a nightly ritual.

Thankfully Neville didn't shun him. The two boys partnered for potions. Snape sneered but he ignored both of them. He gave points to every Slytherin but Harry but he also took points from every Gryffindor except Neville. Harry sighed it was hard to figure out potions on his own but thanks to the extra books he could. Neville wasn't much help but so far they hadn't melted their cauldron which was more than some could say. Harry was grateful for Hermione and her tendency to be oblivious to the social side of things, it meant when he sat next to her in the library at least she didn't move away. It wasn't the same as having the acceptance he had in primary school but it was close enough. Harry focused on treating everyone with respect even those who treated him poorly, to do less would devalue the lessons Sensei taught. Harry kept to a schedule: up early go to a deserted classroom practice martial arts, come back shower dress, revise his study notes before and during breakfast, visit with Hedwig as the owls delivered mail, go to class, to lunch, to class, to the kitchens for a snack, thank heavens for the map. Of course that activity had its odd moments some of the school elves behaved very, very oddly towards him. To the library, to dinner, back to the library until almost curfew, take Hedwig out, then back to the dorms. On the Saturdays he substituted a run around the grounds for his morning classes and doing art and writing letters for his afternoon classes.

Harry got two points in transfiguration for being the first to change his matchstick to a needle. He felt proud until he heard Hermione got five for the same trick, stupid prejudiced old bint looked at him as

if he was cheating. Charms wasn't bad so far all they were studying was magical theory. Harry found that his dicta-quill came in handy for History of Magic he set it to write what Binns was saying while he napped. Defense was awful he didn't know who was behind it but every time he walked into the classroom he got a headache and his pendant heated up. He guessed that jumped finding a book about Occlumency up the importance chart. Herbology he did okay all the experience gardening with Aunt Petunia helped and studying with Neville also helped. Harry rapidly found himself teaching Neville how to study for other classes but the two boys steadily grew closer despite opposition from their housemates.

Astronomy wound up being baby stuff from Harry's perspective name the stars and planets kind of stuff. Harry had learned most of that when he was younger. He had read The American Practical Navigator thanks to Sensei and that dealt with the maths needed to navigate a ship using the stars. As result he had devoured books on astronomy written by modern scientists. He found he could usually complete his astronomy homework faster than even Hermione. Although he couldn't believe a school like Hogwarts didn't have a planetarium. Outside of class he was mostly miserable though, between being the target of pranksters and being shunned by everyone except Hedwig, Neville and Hermione. He almost regretted his decision to be in Slytherin.

His letters to his Aunt were by necessity brief he mentioned in one that he really wished Latin had been offered at primary school. He sent her sketches of Neville and Hermione and his teachers. He was working on an 18"x24" canvas he intended to send her for Christmas, since she had always wanted to see Hogwarts. He also sent letters to Sensei. Talking about his grades but not what he was learning in class. His letters were forwarded via Aunt Petunia, Harry told Sensei it was to save on Postage.

Finally the day of first flying class arrived. Draco Malfoy and Ronald Weasley seemed to be in a boasting contest of which of them were better but it didn't stop either of them from mocking Harry and his two friends. Madam Hooch corrected Draco on his grip. She nodded approvingly as Harry helped both Neville and Hermione. Then came time to push off. Between Ron and Draco's mockery Neville was too nervous, and pushed off too soon. He had no control and Harry wouldn't standby and watch as something happened to his god-brother. Ignoring Madame Hooch, Harry pushed off.

"Neville look at me, eyes on me." He said as he drew level with the terrified boy.

On the ground one of the Gryffindor girls screamed "Look at how high he is, if he falls he'll die."

Neville looked down and blanched the color of rice paper. Harry wanted to slap her, whoever she was. He watched as Neville's grip faltered and he started to fall. Harry instinctively locked his legs around his broom and maintaining his grip with his weaker arm he lunged with his other to catch Neville as he started to fall. Mentally swearing "this is gonna hurt." for they were forty feet above the ground.

Neville was no lightweight Harry managed to grab his arm but when his weight was arrested it caused three things to happen. Harry felt Neville's shoulder pop out of joint. He felt his own strain almost to the popping point if he were one iota less strong it would've, and it caused his broom to flip so he was now hanging from it by his legs and his one arm. Harry willed his broom downwards. It was more of a controlled plummet than an actual flight but when they reached the ground neither boy hit hard enough for anything more than a small bruise.

Madam Hooch hustled over "Are you boys alright?"

"Neville's arm is dislocated at the shoulder, I felt it pop. Mine is strained. But other than that I think we're okay."

"Could you escort him to the infirmary?"

"Yes Ma'am."

"Good job Mr. Potter. Twenty points to Slytherin for saving a classmate."

"Thank you Professor."

Twenty minutes, four potions and one spell later the two boys sat having a cup of tea. Madame Pomfrey had fixed Neville's shoulder given both of them a dose of potion to fix the soft tissue damage and a dose of pain reliever. She allowed Harry to stay with the

understanding that if Neville dropped off Harry was to leave. Neville would be spending the night in the infirmary because he showed signs of shock.

"I thought I was gonna die Harry."

"Not going to happen Neville. Not if I have anything to say about it, I haven't got enough family that I can afford to ignore what family I've got. Ditto for friends. But I've got one request before I save you again, can you trim down a little? That was hard on my shoulder."

"You don't seem to have that problem, can you show me how?"

"Sure, you've got sweats and trainers right?"

"No."

"Fine, over Christmas go to Lillywhite's in London they have tons of stuff. Have, say about one hundred fifty pounds, which is like thirty galleons. Find a pair of trainers have the staff help you choose. Tell them you want cross-trainers, they'll do the rest. Get a pair of sweat pants and a sweatshirt. In the meantime I can teach you some tai chi that will work you on strength and balance. Eat less sugary foods, eat more fruit and vegetables, drink more water, less Pumpkin juice. Neville?"

"Yeah Harry?"

"Do you know where I could find some books on Occlumency? I've checked the library here at school, there's nothing."

"Have you tried Owl order with Flourish and Blott's?"

"Owl order is that anything like mail order?" After a few minutes Harry was sure owl order was exactly like mail order. Harry noticed Neville starting to drift off so he said goodbye to his friend only to meet Hermione on the way out. After reassuring her Neville was fine but asleep. He listened to how Ron and Draco had managed to smash Neville's rememberall. Harry was partly saddened because his friend regarded it as proof of his Gran's love. Harry thought it was more like a reminder of how low her opinion was.

A week and a half later, Harry ran across two lions and an eagle picking on a slightly older solitary Slytherin. One of the Lions was pinning the Slytherin boy. When he saw Harry he said "This doesn't concern you keep moving and nothing will happen to you, firstie."

"Gees. Sorry to disappoint you, but I really can't do that."

"Course you can pipsqueak. Or we'll make an example of a little snake as well."

"No I am afraid I can't, you see I just have this thing against bullies. I see one and it's all I can do not to rip their heads off and use them like chamber pots. Let him go and walk away, that is your best option."

The older of the lions pointed his wand at the other Slytherin "incarcerous." Then his wand shifted to Harry. "I think it's time for a little fun with the baby snake. Those were some awfully big words pipsqueak. Rictum-"

Harry didn't wait for him to finish he quickly ran forward and shifted the wand away from his attacker's ability to use it on him treating it for all intents like a knife in the fight. Harry smoothly moved so he could do a disarm and do a modified hip throw. Ten seconds later the lion was on the ground and his wand had been thrown to the far end of the hall. Harry followed through with a punch that left his opponent trying to remember how to breathe.

"Leave!" Harry ordered. The other two boys looked unsure the youngest one raised his wand but his grip was loose. Harry closed his eyes and reached for his core on opening his eyes he whispered "Accio wand!" closing his hand in a grasping motion. He realized it was unlikely to work but he was also reluctant to draw his wand on another student. Something about snakes not getting the benefit of the doubt from most of the teachers and prefects. The boy fumbled his wand badly. The eagle decided this new snake was more of a threat than he first appeared, turned to say to his cohorts, "Come on Cameron, Cormac, us McLaggens can get our revenge on the Yaxleys another day."

It took a moment but they left. Harry pulled out his wand, he had learned in his readings that a simple Finite canceled most spells. He canceled the spell holding the other boy.

"Thanks I owe you."

"Harry Potter."

"Aaron Yaxley."

"Why did they..?"

"In the last war, the main line Yaxley's followed the dark lord. The MacLaggens got attacked and hurt badly; one of the Death Eaters caught was an uncle of mine another was my grandfather. My father stayed neutral mostly cause he married a halfblood. To the rest of the family we're considered blood traitors but to people like those gits all they see is the last name and the house and that's enough for them. Bastards." He spat some red tinted spit to the floor. "Normally I stick with our house group like I'm supposed to, you know? But I had some questions on the charms assignment and I'm not exactly Mr. Popular back in the dorms. In fact the only one worse off there, is yourself." He paused. "No offense."

"None taken." It was true. Harry wasn't sure why that was, but it was and he knew it. Theoretically someone should have tried to cozy up to him he was the Potter heir, ancient and noble house and all that crap, not to mention the whole BWL crap. But since their Head of House basically ignored his very existence , unless it was to pick on him, the students in Slytherin seemed to mostly do the same.

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Marcus Flint was furious with his Head of House. Six years ago the Professor had taken him and given him rules, reasonable consequences, expectations and when those expectations were met rewards. It had given Marcus stability, stability he didn't get from his half mad Death Eater father and his mother who was either a perfectionist (when sober) or a lush. Marcus had seen him do it for countless kids in Slytherin. He took each Slytherin aside in the first two weeks each year, helped them by setting reasonable expectations not the sometimes absurd ones their parents set, and gave them expectations they could meet and a plan to meet them. The Professor actually did what a head of House should do despite the demands it made on his limited time. Marcus knew from talking to students in other houses only Sprout did those meetings as well.

Marcus had seen such potential in Harry Potter on the train, he figured his Head of House would be pushing the boy. Instead Professor Snape ignored him, completely ignored him. He didn't do the first of year meeting or even schedule the beginning of the year physical that the rest of the snakes endured.

Well if he wouldn't do it Marcus would. He was about to ask the firsties if anyone knew where Potter was when Potter entered with Aaron. Marcus was mildly concerned Aaron unlike Potter knew better than to wander the halls alone. He noticed Aaron's lip seemed a little swollen "You okay Aaron?"

"MacLaggens. Potter here came along and discouraged them." Aaron answered. He knew that unlike some of the snakes Marcus asked from genuine concern. They shared a first cousin, Sandra was his cousin on his father's side and she was Marcus' on his mother's. Sandra might be an almost squib but she was nice and both boys were fond of her.

"That was good of you, Potter." Marcus said. "But I was looking for you for another reason. Come with me." He led Harry to one of the alcoves on either side of the common room fireplace. Snape used these alcoves for his own meetings, putting up a privacy spell. Study groups used them at other times. "Have a seat." Marcus put up a privacy spell. "Okay I haven't done one of these before so please be patient with me. I don't know why the professor hasn't done this, but he hasn't and as I see it you've got to much potential to leave you floundering any longer." He pulled out some parchment so he'd have notes.

"Alright." Marcus remembered his first meeting. "How's your physical health? Do I need to take you to Madame Pomfrey for a physical?"

"I'm a little behind on my magical immunizations. I got them until I was fifteen months, then the ones after that I was missing. I got the first of the ones I'm missing a week before school started and I go to Madame Pomfrey in another month and again in five then I'll be current. As for the rest I'm wearing corrective lenses that I use eye drops for. Madame Pomfrey has records both from Medi-witch Chang, the eye specialist, and from Medi-wizard Shingleton. I exercise and eat right get eight hours or more of sleep most nights."

"Okay that was easy. Homelife?"

"I lived with my maternal aunt and uncle and cousin. They are muggles and afraid of magic."

"Did they ...do anything bad when you did magic growing up?"

"Depended on what happened, most times I got into some sort of trouble. But like I said it depended on what happened."

"Did they beat you, or starve you, or lock you up, did they leave any scars?" he hesitantly asked. Marcus felt bad asking these questions and was a little afraid of the answers but he knew very little about muggles and his father had always punished him with spells and told him to be grateful he didn't punish him the way muggles punished their children.

"No scars, sometimes being confined was part of my punishment, or missing a meal, or extra chores, and yes my uncle spanked me a few times. But my Aunt and Uncle did not abuse me. As long as I minded their rules and did my chores, I had what I needed. They were...they saw to it I had what I needed."

With a little relief at that answer Flint asked his next question. "What are their expectations of you here at Hogwarts?"

"That I learn magic."

Marcus noted Harry seemed about to say something so he waited.

"In a letter from my mother she told me she expected me to be in the top ten of my year. I want that at least, I'd prefer top five given the size of my class."

"Okay, we'll come back to that. Do you know the school rules?"

"Yes, I wasn't about to come here without knowing them."

"House rules?"

Harry rolled his eyes.

Marcus winced, one of the things that hadn't happened this year had been the post sorting meeting in the house. Snape had been

handing out the house rules in the individual meetings. "Okay first do your homework first." He looked at Harry who nodded. " Don't give anyone out of the house the password." Another nod. "Don't go anywhere alone." Marcus wanted to flinch because Harry was treated as a pariah by his year mates in the dorm and no one sat next to him or directly across from him at meals. Harry went just about everywhere alone.

"I don't think that one applies to me." Harry said in an amused tone.

"If you need help ask."

"No duh."

"No fighting with others in the dorm outside the dorm. Us snakes have enough problems outside these walls without presenting a divided front."

"I'll do my best, but no promises. Malfoy is a twit and has some strong bullying tendencies. If he does it much around me, it'll be hard to remember not to clean his clock.

"Okay." Marcus was unsure of the muggle reference. "Um. What things do you like?

"Art, flying seems good I like it."

"Anything else?"

"Not that comes to mind...oh, wait good books."

"What do you hate?"

Harry's green eyes glittered as he said the word "Bullies."

"You said you want to be in the top five of your class. Are there any subjects you need help with?"

"I think I could do better if I got a little help with potions. The books in the kit help but..."

"Aaron the boy you helped. He's tops in his year at potions, I'll help you set up some tutoring with him."

"Thank you. If you don't mind my asking, why are you doing this?"

"Because you have incredible potential. Because it's right. Because with a little guidance you could be the best thing that has happened in four centuries to Slytherin House, or if nothing happens you could become the darkness that snuff the light out and dooms us all. The way everyone's treating you it's...it's not right, sadly though it's typical.

"I was sorted into Slytherin because I was ambitious to change things for the better. My Dad's a Death Eater and he's nuts. Because of the way things are, if he's right and the Dark Lord is still out there or if another one comes along, I'll probably be forced into becoming a follower just cause I'm a Slytherin pureblood and not many paths are open for me. I'm bright but neither bright enough, nor handsome enough, nor connected enough that I can change things the way I wanted. I only made prefect cause my year is light in the intelligence department. I've learned my limitations since joining this house. What ambition of yours got you sorted here?"

"My ambition to be something other than a pawn."

"What?" Marcus didn't understand.

"Maybe I'll explain it to you, when I trust you."

Marcus could see with that answer why the BWL was sorted into Slytherin. "Okay, Professor Snape usually sets a few goals with us and when we hit them we get rewards based on what we like. So ...if you get Exceeds Expectations or Outstandings on all your schoolwork for a month, I'll get you some art supplies or a book from Hogsmeade that you pay for or take you flying on the pitch. Ditto for keeping your nose clean for six weeks. Is there anything else I can help you with?"

" Given the way the Professor feels about me, I'm not sure he grades my potions work fairly. Can we say the exceeds or outstanding on my other classwork and acceptable on my potions? And I need to get a message to the Headmaster."

"That sounds reasonable, as to the Headmaster I see him at the weekly prefects meeting I could give it to him. "

"Tell him I know he has my father's special cloak. I want it back, and I won't wait much longer."

"Your Dad's special cloak, you want it back yesterday, got it. One last question do you have any idea why the Professor is treating you like this?"

"Maybe. My mum said in a letter she left me, that they were friends until he called her "mudblood" in a fit of anger fifth year. And that he and my Dad were legendary rivals mostly over her. I look like him."

In the common room, Draco was smirking at his year mates, "Bet Flint is giving Potter what for in there since he hasn't been following the rules and he's been associating with those two pathetic lions. Just wait in no time Potter will be begging the rest of us to accept him."

Chapter 8 Life at School

At the end of September staff meeting, Albus anxiously awaited to hear the reports of the first years. He had been thrown for quite a loop when Harry had been sorted into Slytherin instead of Gryffindor. He queried the Sorting Hat extensively but the Hat wouldn't budge, it refused categorically to discuss anything about the boy.

Slowly the teachers filed into the staff room and helped themselves to the tea and scones, sandwiches, and tartlets available. Then the meeting began. The usual brainstorming of how to control the Weasley twins, the bickering between Minerva and Severus accusations of favoritism and what not. Comments about how the new prefects were working out. Last year shortly before the May meeting it had been discovered that the fifth year boys Slytherin prefect had been using his position to pressure girls into giving him favors or more specifically their favors. Needless to say he had been removed from both his position and the school with extreme prejudice and he was now serving a stint in Azkaban. Young Miss Keily transferred to Beauxbatons to get away from the memories. Comments were made about which OWLs the teachers thought which students would get top honors in. More bickering between Severus and Minerva about this years Quidditch teams. That was interrupted by Rolanda.

"Enough, both of you. Minerva your team is quite technically proficient but lacks a proper seeker. Severus your team as usual is relying on brute strength to muscle it's way to the top. Both teams stand a chance so would you please stop arguing."

"Well, now that we've discussed the upper years.," Albus used the quiet created by Rolanda to move the meeting on. "what can you all tell me of the first years."

"Gormless nincompoops the lot of them." Severus snarled.

"Rather harsh don't you think." said Filius.

"Fine have it your way. There's an addlepated twit in Minerva's house that thinks if you can quote a book you're a genius of the first order. Not one has asked a sensible question in potions the entire time they've been in school and I can't tell you how many essays I've handed back to them as illegible crap."

"Their handwriting is rather messy, but it's improving." Pomona Sprout spoke.

"Harry Potter is a very good student." Aurora Sinestra, the Astronomy teacher, said.

"Ah, yes here it comes the pantheon of praise for the boy wonder." Severus stated.

Sinestra blushed and looked down to her lap. The core class professors were silent.

"What silence? I'm shocked. What's the matter? Did the nuisance's sorting finally convince you all he's not all he's cracked up to be."

"That's enough Severus Snape." came from Rolanda Hooch. "So Harry isn't a lion, as everyone expected. He's a good boy with a good heart."

"On what do you base this assessment Rolanda?" asked Albus.

"First flying class. Gryffindor and Slytherin. I expected the usual baiting and arguing. And of course there was, Draco Malfoy and Ron Weasley at the heart of it. Mr. Potter was helping Neville Longbottom and Hermione Granger as nice as you please. Then when it's time to push off Mr. Longbottom pushes off to hard, did Mr. Potter leave him to his fate? No, he goes up after him. Then that Brown girl, Minerva, you really need to teach them to watch their words. She scares Mr. Longbottom, saying he's going to die. Longbottom falters, loses his grip, and rather than let his friend fall Harry anchors himself to his broom, and reaches out to grab Mr. Longbottom before he falls far. Both boys were mildly hurt but they were right as rain within an hour. Mr. Potter is a natural on a broom, even better than his father if I had to guess." She looked hard at Professor Snape.

"Don't look at me like that you harpy, I refuse to treat the boy any differently than any other first year."

Albus broke in before an argument could start. "Anyone else?"

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The next day Harry was in the library with Hermione and Neville.

"SO let me get this straight. Draco, cowardly ponce that he is challenges Ron Weasley, lazy but proud leonine git that he is to a duel. So Ron, Dean, and Seamus sneak out to go to this duel, never mind it was probably Malfoy's idea of a clever trap. Neville you're out of the dorm cause Trevor snuck out to the greenhouses and when you got back you couldn't remember the password. Then Hermione in your efforts to discourage the gits you find yourself stuck outside as well."

Hermione and Neville both nodded their heads enthusiastically.

"So you trail after the idiots almost get caught by Filch and wind up behind what had been a locked door in the third floor corridor where there is a huge three headed dog standing on a trap door."

Neville started speaking, "I can't believe they have something like that in a school full of children."

"It's guarding something." Hermione asserted.

Harry was mentally flung back to Diagon Alley and Hagrid telling him there was no place safer than Hogwarts. He had also just last night heard the other boys in his year talking to each other about a break-in at Gringott's in the bathroom. He got up and went to Madame Pince. "Madame Pince, will you help me gather any newspaper stories regarding the recent break-in at Gringott's."

She sniffed disdainfully but she did as he asked.

Moments later he was back at the table with Hermione and Neville. He quickly read through the articles and came to the conclusion that Hagrid's mystery package was what the thief attempted to get. But why let him know about it unless it was ... Harry thought carefully for several minutes then a rational occurred to him. "My advice you two is forget about it. It's Dumbledore's business."

Hermione protested. "That's Professor Dumbledore."

"Don't need to tell me twice mate. If I ever see that dog again it'll be too soon." Neville concurred.

There were six things about Hermione drove Harry nuts. Her slavish belief that those in authority were never wrong. Her belief that books always told the truth. Her frequent lack of tact. Her unrelenting desire to know, didn't matter if it was any of her business she always wanted to know everything. Her belief that since she was so smart she had the right to tell others how to do things, sometimes she was right and others, well other times she was wrong. She ordered Neville around, and the sad part was Neville was so used to being ordered by his Gran it never occurred to him to argue. She tried to order Harry around but he just ignored her, if she did it too much he bluntly told her no to her face. Finally her complete blindness to the fact that she was just as prejudiced towards the magical world as the magical world was towards her. For proof of this Harry only had to watch the way she interacted and her complete lack of awareness of wizarding manners. It wasn't as bad as watching Ron Weasley eat, (Harry personally thought that boy should be fed at a trough outside.) but it was close.

"But Harry, why should we forget about it? Don't you want to know?" came her whiny voice.

Harry briefly debated telling her to get lost. But Neville wasn't well accepted in Gryffindor because of his friendship with Harry and Hermione didn't have the house prejudices and was one of the few lions that accepted Neville and Harry's friendship. Harry thanks to his upbringing was strong enough to stand alone, but Neville was desperate for approval. Harry figure it was to much time spent under the harsh criticism of his Gran. Hermione wasn't much better off with her know-it-all tendencies, the two misfits of Gryffindor first year had sort of latched on to each other. So how much to tell Hermione, Harry debated. What he could tell her that she would believe? "Hermione, in the muggle world are all politicians good?"

"No."

"Dumbledore is Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot that makes him a politician."

"But Harry he's the leader of the light, and he's not a true politician he turned down the Minister of Magic job."

Harry rubbed his temples. "I'm just saying, I don't think he's quite as light as he's painted, and getting mixed up in his business could be very dangerous." Harry knew if he stayed near Hermione much longer he'd say something he'd regret so he packed his stuff and said "I need some fresh air. I'll see you later."

Harry headed back to the dorms and changed into sweats for a run. On his way out, the other first year Slytherins surrounded him. "What is this? Potter dressed like a filthy muggle?"

Harry considered his response carefully. He knew if he fought he could seriously hurt these other students but he had no interest in being a further target for ridicule or abuse either. "I want to burn off some stress; the best way for me to do that is to go for a run. Robes aren't practical for running in, sweats are. Excuse me, I would like by."

"I don't think so. Crabbe, Goyle, hold him. I want to show Potter exactly what he's good for. Target practice. After all he's not loyal to the house, hanging out with those two lions." Draco Malfoy started to pull out his wand.

Harry used what he felt was the minimum force required get the idiot bookends to release him a simple punch to the solar plexus each. Ignoring them as they fell he stepped forward and pinned Draco's wand arm with his wand half drawn and clasp a hand at Draco's throat. "Malfoy, you grew up magical and no doubt know lots and lots of magic. But I doubt you have the focus necessary to perform magic if I were to remove your voice box assuming you survived the procedure."

Draco attempted to swallow in his fear of the intensity in the green eyes looking into his own, but found the other boy's grasp on his throat prevented it.

"I don't care if you call me names, knock yourself out. BUT if you ever attempt to attack me again it will be the last thing you ever do because even if I don't know much magic, I do know how to kill someone. One more thing, you have a problem with muggles and muggleborns that's fine go ahead, your loss. It's what I expect of someone with inbreeding in their family tree. But you try to take those prejudices out on others by being a bully towards my friends, know I will know it, and it will come back and bite you on your skinny

purebred ass." Aware that they were surrounded by Slytherins he raised his voice a bit. "That goes for the rest of you as well." Harry really hoped this little demonstration discouraged the mob mentality of his fellow snakes. Harry released Draco's throat and there wasn't even a red mark to show the prior presence of his hand. Harry pushed past the other first years and out the common room door, heading outdoors to run.

In the corner of the common room Marcus Flint and the two fifth year prefects watched as the confrontation happened. The common room had been almost full of students. The two fifth years wanted to intervene immediately but Marcus had stayed them. He wanted to see how Harry handled it. It had an almost Gryffindorkish tone with the not so subtle threat of physical violence but it had been delivered in such a way there would be no doubt in any snake's mind that it was nothing less than the truth. Harry Potter, BWL, had just gotten his fellow snakes off his back. By threatening Malfoy, the most wealthy and politically connected snake, he had just said to the whole of Slytherin mess with me at your own peril.

Elena Danforth and Sean MacKinnon looked to the older prefect. "Why did you stop us?"

"Potter has been alone since he was sorted here. The Professor has ignored him completely. He needed to establish himself in the pecking order or even better for him, completely out of it. If he didn't, he was at higher risk. He still is sort of at risk, but less so than before. There are still those in the house with dark ties that might hex him. But by remaining a lone snake he's safer from the powers that be outside of Slytherin, than if he became part of the pecking order. But I bet you a galleon Malfoy runs to Snape and tries to get Potter in trouble. I bet a sickle he succeeds too."

Harry came in from his run an hour later and found a bruised and battered Neville at the base of the stairs to the dungeon. "Neville! Oh my goodness stay still. Where do you hurt?"

"My arm and head are the worst."

Harry cast a lumos so he could see better. "What happened?"

"I .." Neville looked away. "I fell."

Harry looked at Neville's face. His nose was swollen and off center and he had the beginnings of a black eye. "Truth Neville, not what you think I want to hear." The blood was very fresh, and some of the marks were clearly from someone's hands.

Harry carefully went through the head to toe check he'd learned in a first-aid class. One ankle was swollen as well. "Does your ankle hurt?"

"Not as much as my arm."

Harry carefully ran his hands along Neville's sides watching his face for signs of discomfort. Once he was sure there were no hidden injuries he allowed Neville to slowly sit up. "Neville?"

"Some of the other older boys in Gryffindor, reckon I was miss-sorted thought they'd help to the dungeons so I could be with my snaky friend."

"Those bastards! Neville your injuries need more than I can do, you'll have to go to the infirmary. I can't get you there by myself. I'm going to get help. Okay?"

Harry went to the Professor's office but he wasn't there. So he headed to the common room for a prefect. Once in the common room he made a beeline for Flint.

Flint a little surprised since Harry had never approached anyone, said, "What is it Potter?"

"A student has been hurt and I need help getting him to the infirmary."

Flint accompanied Harry back out to where Neville sat. He said the spells to splint Neville's arm and ankle, that he'd learned for quidditch. Then he conjured a stretcher. All the while wondering what happened. Madame Pomfrey was pleased he had immobilized the Gryffindor's injuries before moving him and gave Slytherin twenty-five points. She dismissed Harry and Marcus back to their dorm. Then she called in Minerva and Albus.

Both Professors frowned when they were told what had happened.

Minerva snarled, "I will of course assign detention to the boys involved but perhaps Mr. Longbottom, you should reconsider your association with Mr. Potter."

Neville tightened his jaw mulishly. "No, he's my god-brother and he has proven himself to me. I'd rather be resorted to Slytherin, than give in to the bullies in Gryffindor."

Albus smiled slightly. "Admirable sentiments my dear boy but do be cautious in who you voice them to. It's been many a year since there was a friendship between a lion and a snake. How do you know Mr. Potter is your god-brother?"

"His mum left him a letter in his vault. She told him, and he told me on the train."

"Ah, I see. I wonder what else was in that letter." Albus wasn't happy to hear that, who knew what else was in that letter. The knowledge of his father's cloak must have come from it. He would have to question Hagrid see if he had seen this letter if not he'd have to inquire with the goblins.

Minerva said, "What do you mean bullies in Gryffindor?"

"No offense ma'am. But I get called a squib and traitor a lot. Hermione Granger gets called know-it-all and traitor too. Both of us are mostly shunned, and I know Fred and George Weasley have been pranking Harry almost non-stop since the start of term. They brag about it in the common room. If that's not bullying, I don't know what is. Harry brushes it off, says if he ignores it it'll stop, plus he's learning a lot, learning the counters. But I'm not sure I believe it. Also the MacLaggens have threatened bodily harm on both Harry and Aaron Yaxley. I only know about Aaron cause Harry stepped in and helped him against them a fortnight ago, and in return he's tutoring me and Harry in Potions two afternoons a week."

"I see." Minerva McGonagall was surprised. She had never looked at the behavior of her lions in that light and it was disquieting to do so.

Meanwhile down in the dungeons, Professor Snape was calling Harry to his office. "Mr. Potter. Comfortable are we?"

Harry's instincts were pushing him into fight or flight mode.

Something in the Professor's expression put him on edge. But he ruthlessly overrode the impulses coursing in his veins. "Sir?"

"I assume you are comfortable, as you feel yourself free to bully your housemates as your father did."

Harry thought, 'Malfoy, that git'. But he held his tongue, knowing from his years with Uncle Vernon silence was almost always the best answer in the face of an angry adult.

"You say nothing? Your father was a spoiled, bullying, braggart, and it's clear to see the apple didn't fall far from the tree." Snape sneered. "Well I won't have such behavior from a member of my house! Detention Potter! For the next three weeks your weekends are mine, rest assured I have tasks that will take you down a peg or two."

Harry sighed. Professor Snape clearly still had issues with Harry's father. It was so pathetic really. A supposedly grown man having issues with a man who had been dead and gone almost a decade taking it out on a child, who although he physically resembled James Potter had no memories with which to judge if he was like him or not. Oh well, Harry was used to his life being less than fair, it had always been so since Dumbledore came into his life. He just hoped Snape's punishment didn't undermine what he'd done to position himself in Slytherin. It really wouldn't do to have to make good on his threats, but if it meant his life he would do it. He just hoped he was able to get some advanced defense texts and a books about Occlumency from Flourish and Blott's soon.

The following morning he was disappointed. Hedwig had arrived with a return message.

Dear Mr. Potter,

I'm afraid most the books you requested are restricted by the ministry, for aurors and for adults in certain careers; medi-wizardy, and law wizards. My apologies.

Mr. Ebenezer S. Blott's

Harry wrote another request this time using his fame.

Dear Mr. Blott's,

I understand. But this refusal puts me in a horrible bind. You see, after I got rid of Voldemort, I was placed with muggle relatives, and on my return to the magical world. I find many of his old followers hold grudges. I was hoping to buy those books so I could study and I would stand a chance against them. I had hoped that you would understand. I was merely trying to fulfill my dead mother's wishes and see to it that my parents sacrifice was not in vain.

Sincerely, Harry Potter

The following morning at eight he reported to Snape for the first of his detentions.

"So Potter you know how to be prompt. That's something at least. Today you will scrub down cauldrons as no magic is to be used I will be confiscating your wand until you are done to my satisfaction." He extended his hand.

Harry reluctantly handed his wand over. He walked over to the sink and the cauldrons and started scrubbing.

Snape looked at the custom wand in his hand. "So a custom wand, too good for a standard wand? Albus and your family certainly spoil you."

Harry ignored his Professor and merely scrubbed the cauldrons.

"I despise you, Potter. I don't know how you fooled the hat into placing you in my house but you'll find that if you act like your father I will certainly make sure you regret it. I heard about you flying to the rescue of your little lion friend. Just like your father thinking you can do anything on a broom. I've seen you walk the halls alone. You should have been in Gryffindor, a Slytherin would have better sense. Hanging about with those two lions, they'll turn on you, you know. What use could either of them be? He's practically a squib and she's nothing but a bloody muggleborn. You are too stupid for words, Slytherins don't have friends. They have connections to those that are of use."

Harry ignored the Professor as he continued his diatribe. Focusing on scraping the burnt on sludge from the cauldrons in front of him. Four hours later, Harry sat back the pile of thirty cauldrons were now completely clean his hands were slightly raw from the long exposure to cleaning potion and the pumice stick he'd used to get some of the gunk out of the cauldrons with but they were clean. Harry drained the sink then approached the Professor's desk. "Professor I'm done."

The professor gave him a disbelieving look and got up to inspect the cauldrons. They looked almost new there was only the small dents and scratches that came from use to show they weren't. Snape frowned it should have taken Potter the whole day to get them looking this way. "Very well, you are dismissed to lunch, be back this afternoon. There's a barrel of pickled toads for you to eviscerate."

"Yes, sir. May I have my wand back? Please."

Snape reluctantly handed it back. He didn't want to hand this particular child a weapon, but knew if he didn't Albus would have his head. He shouldn't have confiscated it in the first place. If he admitted it to himself, he had been curious to see what sort of wand had called to the boy. He wanted to break this boy, as the boy's father had broken him. James stole from him that which he treasured most, Lily. But there was that not so small matter of the promise Albus had extracted from him to protect the wretched boy. It was enough to give one a migraine.

Chapter 9 Halloween

By Halloween Harry had settled into a routine, ninety percent of which consisted of ignoring the juvenile behaviors of ninety percent of the inhabitants of Hogwarts. It consisted on Mondays getting up working out, cleaning up, going to breakfast, getting pranked, going to class, going to lunch, going to class, going to the library and studying with Hermione and Neville, going to dinner, going back to the library, then to the dorm where the other snakes made disparaging comments or pranked him. The rest of the week tended to follow the same pattern. With the exception of Friday where at the end of Potions class the Professor inevitably said "Potter a word if you please." and as soon as all the Gryffindors were out of the room he would assign a detention. Harry ignored the pranks, he ignored the stares, he ignored the whispers. He even ignored the occasional shove.

Harry felt proud of his self-control. He had gotten very good at figuring out just how he had been pranked and how to counter it. He had earned a flight with Marcus on the pitch, and he had also found himself second overall in his year Hermione was first. In Potions despite his doubts about Snape's fairness, he was ranked fourth but he made up for it by being first in Astronomy, tied for first in Charms, Defense Against Dark Arts and History of Magic with Hermione, tied three ways with Hermione and Neville in Herbology. And solidly second in transfiguration once again shared with Hermione, Terry Boot of Ravenclaw took the honor of being first in transfiguration.

Harry spent long hours studying in the library with Neville and Hermione. He found himself teaching Neville how to study and gradually Neville had stopped letting Hermione dictate to him all the time, something about her explanations were always too similar to the books for them to always help him. Harry's explanations were always practical visualization and kinetic instead of theoretical and had given him several breakthroughs, although as difficult a time as Neville had, Harry was sure there was something wonky with his wand.

Halloween morning, an owl arrived with a parcel for Harry. Curious Harry opened the attached letter first.

Dear Mr. Potter,

First may I congratulate you on being sorted to my old house. My friend and partner Mr. Blotts was quite distraught and guilty over the last letter you sent him. I reassured him, I would take care of it. Those books on your list are restricted for sale by the ministry. But oddly enough I was buying some books from an estate sale of a retired auror and I found a stack containing those books and a couple others. Tucked inside one of those books was a letter stating he wished for those books to be bequeathed to you, but apparently he misplaced the letter to his solicitors to that effect. Who am I to get in the way of a wizard's last wishes. Since I in good faith paid his estate five galleons for the books I have billed your Gringott's account for the same. Here are the books Mr. Potter, should anyone from the Ministry ask, I will tell them what I have just told you. Keep us in mind for future purchases.

Sincerely, Mr. Jacob M. Flourish

"Yes!" Harry said with a grin. He quickly finished his breakfast before scurrying back to the dorm to properly stow his new books before class. He barely made it to Herbology on time. But he didn't care because he was so happy.

At the end of classes he headed to the library where he met Neville. "Where's Hermione?"

"I'm not sure. Ron Weasley was super mean to her at the end of charms and I haven't seen her since."

"That sucks, how did learning wingardium leviosa go?"

"Poorly."

"Okay let's break it down for you then."

An hour later it was almost time for the feast and Neville had gotten the charm to work, sort of. The two boys packed away their books and headed to their separate dorms. There wouldn't be an after dinner study session due to the Halloween feast. At dinner there was still no sign of Hermione.

Midway through the feast Professor Quirrell barged in bellowing about a troll in the dungeons before passing out. Harry sat there in shock as Dumbledore ordered Prefects to guide the houses back to

their common rooms never mind that the Slytherin common room was in the dungeon. In the chaos not one of the Slytherin prefects realized that Harry didn't go with them. And not one of the Gryffindor prefects noticed when Neville slipped away or that Hermione wasn't there at all.

Neville crouched beside Harry at the Slytherin table. "What are we going to do? What about Hermione?"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Of course but now isn't the time!"

"No, this precisely the time. I solemnly swear, I'm up to no good." Harry said as he touched his wand to an old parchment.

Neville's jaw dropped as a map of Hogwarts appeared.

Harry touched his wand to the map again "Show me Hermione Granger." A moment later the map zoomed in to the fourth floor girl's loo. "There she is. Mischief managed. Come on."

The two boys moved swiftly through side passages until they reached the fourth floor. When they were twenty feet from the girls loo on the fourth floor, they noticed the door wasn't hanging from the hinges correctly and they could hear a low roar and terrified shrieks. They ran through the door.

Hermione Jean Granger was sure this was it, her life was over. A few minutes ago she had been mourning the fact she didn't have any friends. And now she was going to die at the hands of a giant enormous smelly creature with the intelligence of a mouse. If she had not been bent over trying to muffle her sobs she would already be dead. Her head hurt and was bleeding from where the shards of the shattered stall had hit her.

The troll raised its club, and went to step closer.

Harry in the door did the first spell that he ever learned. "Accio troll's feet!" throwing in as much energy as possible into the spell. The troll was suddenly yanked off its feet as it fell Harry noticed its club half hitting its head as it went down. Harry decided he must have thrown a bit too much power into the spell as he suddenly felt very woozy.

Neville next to Harry was terrified as his friend staggered beside him. The troll was still conscious and was moving sluggishly. Neville did the first thing that came to mind. He noticed one of the sinks that had been knocked off the wall near the troll's head. "WINGARDIUM LEVIOSA!" he lifted the heavy sink and dropped it on the troll's head. He was relieved when the troll stopped moving. "Harry?"

"I'm alright think I put a little too much in that spell. Check 'mione." Harry's voice slurred a little but made enough sense. Neville was sure he was right.

"Hermione? Are you alright?" Neville quickly called, reluctant to actually step further into a room designated girls only.

"I thought I was going to die." sobbed a slightly hysterical, bruised and bleeding Hermione as she climbed over the wreckage of broken sinks and stalls and unconscious troll to join the two boys.

"What now?"

Harry looked at Hermione, she definitely needed the infirmary. He was sure all he needed was sleep. Neville seemed fine if slightly shocked by his own daring. "Infirmary."

The three helped each other towards the door. Just as Harry was about to pull it open it was pushed open from the other side knocking him backwards and onto his rump. "Ow."

"What in Heavens name is the meaning of this?" shrieked McGonagall. "You three are supposed to be in your common room not in a girls bathroom with a troll-" she trailed off as she realized that said troll had been neutralized. "Explain. Immediately."

Neville looked at his companions then back at Professors McGonagall, Snape, and Quirell. Deciding this was no time for pride, "Ron Weasley made Hermione cry after Charms. She wasn't at dinner to hear the announcement about the troll. Harry and I came to get her. The troll was here when we got here so Harry knocked it down and I knocked it out. I think Hermione should go to the infirmary and Harry is wiped out."

Professor McGonagall looked at him in disbelief.

Professor Quirrell said "R-r-really what sp-spells did you boys u-u-uuse?"

"Harry accioed the trolls feet making it fall. And I did Wingardium leviosa on the sink there next to its head to hit it on the head."

"Miss Granger five points from Gryffindor for being out of bounds and being in the bathroom instead of at the feast. Mr. Longbottom for the courage and initiative to go and rescue a class mate five points to Gryffindor." McGonagall intoned.

"Fi-i-ive p-p-points as w-well for a w-well done le-lev-vitation charm." Quirrell stuttered.

"Please escort Miss Granger to the Hospital wing."

"But-"

"Mr. Longbottom, I will look after Mr. Potter." came Professor Snape's sinister purr.

"But-"

"Go on Nev- it'll be fine; 'mione needs looking after." Harry's voice came softly.

Harry looked at his teachers. He knew better than to expect anything but point deductions. He had gotten their measure since school began. Fairness hadn't been part of his life for a long time. "If you professors don't mind, I'm pretty tired I'd like to head back to my dorm."

"I'll escort him back." came Professor Snape's voice.

Once they were out of earshot of the other professors, Snape started. "Stupid, foolish boy. If it weren't against my principles I would remove a hundred points for you acting the Gryffindor. But that would unfairly penalize your housemates. But you will pay for your stupidity. Those weekend detentions you seem so fond of will continue until the end of the fall term. Half of them will be with Filch. Hopefully you'll wake up to the fact you are supposed to be in Slytherin.

"Too bloody proud of your own stupidity? You have all the arrogance of your father, without any redeeming qualities. You're just like he was minus the honesty that made him a Gryffindor. You are worthless, a burden on all who know you. The Headmaster had such high hopes for you, but he wanted a perfect Gryffindor. Instead he got you, a stupid boy who can't even exemplify the best of his own house, disgusting.

"But how to teach you what is expected, detention obviously isn't enough... To that end I think I'll ground you if you are not in class or at meals or in detention, then you will have to be in the dorm."

"But sir-

"Slytherins don't rush into danger they use their brains to avoid it, you are a disgrace to your house... and to your family." They were approaching the top of the stairs to the dungeons "Your father must be rolling in his grave, a Potter in Slytherin. I wonder if he would've followed the example of your dammed mutt of a godfather's family, and disowned you. How I would enjoy the look on either of their faces, the horror and shame I'm certain would be there... "

Marcus Flint was frantic, he had done a head count once they returned to the dorm. It hadn't sunk in when Dumbledore had given the order that it moved the Slytherins into danger to follow it, that was until they were already halfway there. He had tightened up the stragglers and had prepared one of the more lethal hexes his father had taught him in case the troll showed up. They got to the dorm safe and sound minus one young, serious minded, Slytherin. He headed back up to the main castle to see if he could find the missing boy or the Professors to let them know. As he approached the stairs he heard Professor Snape's voice there was a note he had never heard before in it. Professor Snape was snarky and sarcastic that was a given, but never in his hearing had this taunting cruelty been part of it. He climbed the last few steps only to see the Professor and Harry. Harry was pale and obviously exhausted and the Professor's last words crept through the darkened hallway and made Marcus flinch. He decided to break into the conversation. "I see you found him sir."

"Yes, Mr. Flint I found our wayward snake. He is to stay in the dorms when not in class or at meals until he learns what it means to be a snake."

"Sir?"

"He ventured off to play hero, he spends too much time with those two lions."

Marcus was appalled. Here was his revered professor attacking a child through the means of taunting him that the boy's dead family would be ashamed of him, and doing his best to sever the only emotional ties the isolated boy had formed at school. This was not the man he respected, this was not the person he looked up to. These words and actions were petty and bitter towards a child who had been nothing but respectful. Furthermore to condemn the boy to the dorms would also deprive the house of the points Potter was earning by being well-versed in his schoolwork through studying in the library with the two lions. What was worse was that Harry seemed to accept such behavior from the Professor as his due. "And if he needs the library for his schoolwork, sir?"

"Why do you care Mr. Flint?"

"He earns the house more points than any other first year, sir."

"Hmm. I suppose he can be in the library if you are there as well Mr. Flint. But there will be no more of the unsupervised interaction with those two lions. He needs to build ties in Slytherin house."

"For how long sir?" Marcus couldn't believe that the Professor really didn't see how dangerous that was for Harry. Having closer ties in Slytherin would make the powers that be that were already nervous over the boy's sorting even more uncomfortable.

"Until the end of fall term at the very least, Mr. Flint."

"Yes, sir." He was completely disappointed in his professor. Surely the man understood how dangerous for Harry that would be, was he trying to endanger him? Mentally he started to make a list of potential contacts he could encourage that wouldn't endanger Harry. He didn't know why he felt so strongly about protecting Harry, but something told him it was the most important thing he would ever do,

un-Slytherin and blood traitorous though those thoughts and and feelings might be. Marcus reached out and grasped Harry's shoulder. "I'll see to it he learns his place sir."

Marcus steered Harry through the dungeon corridors to the Slytherin common room then into Harry's own room. The boy promptly pulled off his robes, and changed to pajamas. "What happened Harry?"

"I was sodding stupid, alright. I'm about to fall on my bloody nose cause I'm wiped out. I'll talk to you in the morning." Harry gave Marcus a halfhearted glare.

"Fine I'll be waiting for you in the common room at dawn." Marcus knew that unlike most the Slytherin firsties Harry was always up early.

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Harry woke slightly before sunup not that that was hard at this latitude at this time of year. He shivered slightly and pulled on his sweats. He grabbed both his bo and his bokken, before going to the common room. Marcus was waiting for him.

The older boy yawned widely and gave Harry a semi-disgusted look. "How can you look so awake at this hour? It's obscene."

"Habit." Harry managed to bite back his grin for the benefit of the older boy. "Why did you want to meet this early if you don't like mornings?"

"Fewer ears."

"Ah. Snape said I was grounded to the dorm unless you were with me. Are you willing to come to the classroom I use for exercise?"

"I suppose, if you make it worth my while and explain what happened last night."

Harry nodded. They went up the stairs to an unused classroom on the first floor where they were joined by Neville. Neville and Harry warmed up with tai chi then Harry did a series of katas while Neville repeated the tai chi. Harry told Marcus everything that happened from the time he met Neville in the library before dinner until Snape

had passed him back off to Marcus as he moved through his exercises.

"Man that sucks. I mean if you were any house but Slytherin they'd have been falling all over themselves to give you points I mean a first year casting a fourth year charm. And helping another house to boot. This is so unfair."

Neville, who'd been quiet, chimed in, "Tell us about it. McGonagall has already asked me to drop Harry as a friend. Thanks Harry, I'm done. See ya later."

After nodding to Neville as he left. Harry said, "Welcome to the story of my life. I didn't fall into their predestined mold of boy hero, golden boy of Gryffindor so now they look at everything I do from this microscope of "is he dark? Why is he doing this? Do we dare reward this behavior or will that make him evil or is he already evil and just trying to lull us into a false sense of security?" It's just so much bullshit. I want to be my own person, you know make my own decisions. I went with Neville after Hermione because she's sort of a friend not a great one, I'll grant. The girl doesn't have the street sense God gave a goose, but her heart is in the right place. Once I pointed out how much nonsense the Boy-Who-Lived hype is, she's treated me like a person which is more than ninety percent of the school population can say. And Nev, well he's the closest thing I've got to family in the magical world. It may be Gryffindorkish or Puffish of me but I would stand beside Neville against anyone."

"Did the hat want to put you in Gryffindor?"

"That was one of my options."

"Why Slytherin then?"

"Dumbledore. If I went to Gryffindor or one of the other houses, he wins. And if there's one thing I don't want, it's for our esteemed Headmaster to get what he wants." Harry's emphasis made it crystal clear he meant the opposite of his words.

Marcus sensing Harry wouldn't say more without assurances threw up some hasty privacy wards. "Why the dislike?"

Harry shook his head no.

Marcus debated briefly the wisdom of doing what he was about to do. His father would throw a fit, and if he did this he could never follow the path his father wanted him to, not that he wanted to follow his father's path. "My oath as a wizard what you say will remain just between us."

Harry's green eyes acquired an intensity Marcus found hard to meet. "Can you guarantee it Marcus? Against everyone, even someone who can read your mind?"

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Up in Gryffindor tower, Neville was ready to spit nails. Harry had saved Hermione from the troll, and here he was listening as Fred and George plotted their latest prank against Harry. And McGonagall didn't give Harry any points last night. Instead she sent him away with Snape, who anyone could see hated Harry. Harry was in fact being punished for helping Hermione. It was just wrong. Harry just accepted it as if he didn't expect anything different and maybe he didn't, but Neville wasn't raised that way. His Gran had taught him right from wrong. And the way Harry was treated was just flat wrong. Neville decided he would write Gran. She needed to know what was going on all of it the good and the bad, she would know what to do.

He started by writing about the train ride the things Harry had said and done on the train and all the times they had spent together since. Emphasizing what had happened in flying class, and how Neville felt that the prejudice Harry faced because he had been sorted into Slytherin was just wrong and what was her advice on how he was to help his friend and godbrother.

Chapter 10 Calculated Risks

Marcus Flint did what the professor told him to do. Harry was only allowed out of the dorm under his escort or for classes, meals and detentions. What he didn't say to anyone was that he rearranged his own schedule to accommodate Harry's habits as much as possible. He took to rising early and going to a first floor classroom where he promptly dozed back off, so Harry still worked out with Neville without the rest of the school knowing. Despite Professor Snape, Harry's study sessions with Neville and Hermione continued just not the same way. On days that the Slytherin quidditch team practices were held Harry, Neville, and Hermione studied in the quidditch stands. The other afternoons were unchanged. His post dinner studies in the library took place the nights Marcus didn't have prefect's patrol. Patrol nights were spent in the the Slytherin common room where Harry was by turns tutor or tutored, by carefully selected Slytherins of all the lower years. When his hardline peers queried, Marcus muttered "orders" resentfully as possible.

The Slytherins Marcus selected had been decidedly nervous to be approached by a Flint. Knowing he was from a hardline pureblood family, they were surprised to be asked to interact with the Boy-Who-Lived instead of being threatened. Aaron Yaxley had been easy since he and Marcus were kissing cousins as it were, Harry had already done him a favor and he was already acting as a potions tutor for Harry and Neville. Marcus asked Harry to tutor Daphne Greengrass and Tracy Davis in Charms and Transfiguration. After a couple of weeks both girls had joined in on the study sessions in the library, and he was often seen with Tracey and Daphne when walking to classes.

Marcus got William Vessey and his friend Daniel Stout both of whom were in third year and half bloods to tutor Harry in defense since Quirrell was such a pathetic excuse of a defense teacher. . Both boys had a nasty reputation for being tough customers, purebloods had only harassed the two boys a few months their first year before it had become apparent it was unhealthy to do so. It helped that Stout's father was an auror.

It took most of a month but Harry no longer sat alone at the Slytherin table at meals. In the library Flint always sat at the next table to keep an eye on Harry as per his agreement with the Professor. Marcus

knew he was walking a fine line and he prayed that word of this never got back to his father or he'd get, well more pain than he liked, he was sure.

He was relieved that Harry seemed to get what was going on. It allowed him to act as if he was only doing it because of the Professor, but both boys knew the truth. Harry's every now and again mouthing off as if he resented Marcus, and making no secret of the Professor's weekend detentions, allowed Marcus to maintain the fiction.

Harry meanwhile had a new burden to bear. Draco Malfoy, having already blown any hope of gaining The Boy-Who-Lived as an ally or a follower by calling him mudblood and insulting his godbrother, decided to make Harry's life a misery by doing his best to sabotage Harry's potions and other class work. Four times now he had added something to Harry's potion and twice it had ruined it. If that were not enough he kept trying to get Harry in trouble with the other Professors. Harry was getting seriously pissed off. Malfoy liked to lord around Slytherin and brag about how rich he was and how his daddy was on the board of governors, and how his daddy was a personal friend of the Minister of Magic. And how thanks to his Godfather being Professor Snape he could get away with almost anything. In fact he bragged about how stupid Harry was not to realize someone had added something to his cauldron.

Harry finally got fed up. Marcus and the other prefects were at a meeting but due back soon and Draco was posturing. The older students didn't like him any more than Harry did but were so political they hesitated to stop him. The only ones truly impressed were the kids of their year and the second years whose families had been Death Eaters. So Harry spoke up. "Yeah, yeah give it a rest daddy's boy. We all know your daddy was Voldemort's bitch and paid a butt load of gold to stay out of jail when he fell. All daddy's money can't make you less than pathetic, you're too stupid to excel on your own merits, too weak to go around without your bodyguards, and too vain to do more than throw your daddy's name and money around. Hell you spend more time in the bathroom than a girl. Ooo, I'm so scared, NOT." Part of Harry noticed all the squeaks, dropped jaws and the sudden snickers around the common room.

Draco opened and closed his mouth several times before exploding. He drew his wand and cast Reducto point blank at Harry. His timing

couldn't have been better or worse depending on the point of view. The prefects, Professor Snape, and surprisingly Albus Dumbledore had just opened the common room door.

Harry having expected some response had drawn his wand from the holster on his forearm and already cast a protego in response to Draco's drawing his wand. When Daniel had taught it to him an hour ago he hadn't anticipated using it so soon. The shield held, mostly. Harry's training had taught him the value of a good dodge so he was already moving away. So when Harry's shield fell, all that really happened was the spell knocked him over onto the floor and as he fell back he hit his head on a table.

Dumbledore and Snape's simultaneous roars of "What is going on here?" brought the room to a standstill.

Draco and the rest of the Slytherins paled. Out of favor or not, provoked or not, an attack on the Boy-Who-Lived by the son of a Death Eater would not be overlooked by the Headmaster.

Harry rolled up to a sitting position as the stars he was seeing faded and rubbed his head where he hit it. He frowned as his fingers came away with blood on them. "Son of a bitch." Harry suddenly realized all eyes were on him.

"Mr. Potter is there a reasonable explanation for what I just witnessed?" Dumbledore asked.

"Oh it's you. Reasonable explanation? Hm. I suppose I could explain, sort of...Reasonable, I doubt it. Mr. Malfoy has been sabotaging my potions work and being generally insulting not to mention trying to get me in trouble with the professors. I spoke a few truths and he was retaliating for comments I made about him and his father, and trying to assert his superiority of blood on me, a lowly halfblood, when I failed to recognize that I should bow before his wealth and position and blood purity. After all he is the son of the old, honorable and wealthy house of Malfoy, never mind that I am the Lord of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter. Whose rank is greater than the house of Malfoy. If you'll pardon me I think I should go to the infirmary, I'm bleeding and have something of a headache." Harry headed to the door, he paused. "By the way Headmaster, I'm still waiting for you to return my father's cloak. Please do so soon, after all we wouldn't want the world to think you a thief, would we?" By

this point Harry's eyes weren't entirely focused and he turned to continue on his way. Aaron Yaxley was the first to come out of his shock and he slipped out to make sure Harry made it to the infirmary.

Severus Snape was furious and frightened to the center of his twisted miserable soul. He had given an Unbreakable Vow to protect Lily's son, to do what ever it took to protect him. He had been frightened on Halloween when the boy had foolishly gone after the Granger twit and defeated a troll. But this was infinitely worse, his godson had fired a reductor curse point blank in the common room. Had Lily's son been one whit less capable, Snape would have been forsworn, his magic forfeit. "Draco your wand." He extended his hand for it.

Draco whitened. "But Godfather-"

"Shut up you stupid boy! Do you have any idea what you have done?"

"But it's his fault!"

"Give up your wand and I'll do my best to see you aren't expelled. But a reductor curse at point blank range regardless of what Potter said could be considered attempted murder, do you really want to argue with me!" Snape argued. Draco looked ready to pass out, but he handed his wand to his godfather. "All of you, I know it's a trial to have that- that boy in this house, given the ties I know many of you have. But this needs to be crystal clear. Regardless of what that... no matter what he says or does Mr. Potter is Slytherin, despite how many of us dislike that fact, therefore his life and safety is sacrosanct within the grounds of Hogwarts. Am I understood?"

Almost the whole of Slytherin house had been in the common room for the whole scene. So they answered their Head affirmatively. Only about half of the house were actually from Death Eater families. The other half was now set to wondering was Harry the next dark lord or was he their hope of breaking from the expectations of Slytherin House.

Albus meanwhile was trying to calculate how Harry could know what he had said. How did Harry know he was Lord Potter? Was it his mother's letter? Did he know about Albus overriding the wills? What had Petunia taught the boy? Was Harry dark? Would Harry

cooperate with his fate or would he, heaven help the magical world, fight his fate? He was oblivious to the chaos that was going on around him so worried was he about his plans.

Up in infirmary, Harry half staggered to the closest bed.

"Oh my goodness Mr. Potter! What happened?"

"I had an accident, hurt my head, it made acquaintance with a table and I really wish it hadn't. Can you fix it?"

"Acquaintance with a table huh? How did that happen?" Poppy Pomfrey had met with Harry twice since he came to school. She had delivered Harry and Neville and had given them almost all their immunizations at least until Harry left the wizarding world, and she still had a soft spot for both boys. The first time she saw Harry was when he dropped off his medical records and confirmed with her dates for his immunizations and his eye appointment in February. He had struck her as being so adult despite being a boy. The second had been following the mishap in the first flying class. Most the other first years had been in for bumps, bruises, and sympathetic hugs from a mother figure. Harry, she had discovered that second visit, was extremely uncomfortable with mothering of any kind and didn't consider bumps and bruises worth mentioning. She cast a diagnostic charm, ignoring the fact he didn't answer. Harry had a very mild concussion, and the skin on the back of his head had split because of the large lump forming under the contusion where his head had struck the table. She resisted the urge to cluck at him the way she did most students. Aaron Yaxley came in, he waved his hand to show he was here to watch over Harry. Instead of clucking at Harry, she handed him a dose of the potion to fix his concussion and a pain reliever. He drank them both making faces each time. She then washed his wound and cast an episkey. "There that should set you right. Rest for an hour then I'll check you again. I want to make sure the concussion potion does its job. So while you're waiting, care to tell me how the back of your head made the acquaintance of a table?"

"Not really. It's my own damn fault."

Madame Pomfrey shook her head and retreated to her office.

Aaron sidled over to the bed Harry was on. "How'd you do that?"

"What?"

"Get her not to fuss."

"I told her if she fussed, I was leaving and never coming back."

"When? I didn't hear you say that."

"Last time I was here. She was being all hovering, and I told her she was making me very uncomfortable, and if she fussed I would leave and never come back. She seemed to believe me."

"Oh." Aaron backed away to let Harry rest. He wanted to figure out all the ramifications of Harry's actions before returning to Slytherin. At first he thought Harry was just being his somewhat Gryffindorish self, but the insults could have been calculated for maximum insult. The old saying the truth hurts being very true. While Harry had lucked out with the timing of the appearance of the prefects. The head of house, and the Headmaster's appearance had been fortuitous. Harry also hadn't said a word until after he had learned the shield spell from William and Daniel. And it was about the average time the prefects got back from the weekly meeting. Which half implied Harry set Draco up. Which implied he was way more Slytherin than anyone else realized. Aaron suddenly had the urge to hide in the potions lab, because as volatile as potions ingredients were they at least were predictable. Harry wasn't dark yet, he didn't think. But if he got treated poorly enough by enough people it wouldn't be hard for him to turn dark. Aaron wondered if Marcus saw it too. Maybe that was why he had been so careful building ties for Harry in Slytherin house. He reluctantly moved back towards Harry. "Um, Harry?"

"Yes, Aaron."

"I..um..need to go, unless you want me to stay."

Harry's green eyes opened they held a relaxed warmth that reminded Aaron of a spring day. "Thanks but I'll be fine."

Aaron relaxed a fair bit at Harry's expression. It must have been his imagination.

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Early the next morning an uncomfortable group of adults gathered in the Headmasters office. Professor Dumbledore, Professor Snape, Lucius Malfoy, and Rufus Scrimgeour were gathered to discuss the fate of Draco Malfoy.

"I don't care he's only eleven. The boy attempted to kill a national hero," Rufus ranted. "He should be expelled with his wand broken."

"He was provoked!" came from Lucius.

"Draco is hot-tempered and unused to thinking about consequences for his actions, but I beg you don't condemn him to a life without magic." Snape pleaded. "The Potter boy did provoke him. Not without justification I know, but anyone would have lost their temper with what he said much less a young immature boy like Draco."

And so it went for almost an hour. Finally Dumbledore said "Enough, obviously young Mr. Malfoy has made a dreadful misjudgment but I believe it behooves the ministry to be merciful in this instance. I believe that a trace could be be our answer, a more restrictive one than normal to be sure. One that traces not his wand as is normal but one that traces his magic itself."

"One where his every spell has to be accounted for?" Rufus queried.

Dumbledore nodded. "He will for the next two years be required to be in the presence of a certified teacher to cast any spells, and will be restricted from any offensive spells until the end of his fifth year except in the course of his classes."

"Fine and if he casts a single non approved spell..." Rufus stated.

"Expulsion." Dumbledore assured.

Lucius Malfoy looked ready to kill but even he could see this was a good as it was likely to get for Draco. "And Mr. Potter's punishment? I will not have him getting off scot free."

"He has had to spend time in the infirmary, I think that punishment enough for an intemperate tongue." Rufus intoned.

"He gravely insulted me and my son."

"As I understand it the boy is already being punished by his Head of House for Gryffindorish tendencies. He has been amply provoked on numerous occasions by your son and he finally retaliated with a few provocatively albeit poorly worded truths. He is only eleven after all." Mimicking Lucius' own words about Draco. "That is unless you wish to recant what you claimed at the end of the last war?" Rufus arched an eyebrow. He had all but roared with laughter when he had heard exactly what the Boy-Who-Lived had said to the Malfoy boy and couldn't wait to share it with the majority of the aurors back at the office.

Although furious, Lucius knew when continuing was a losing proposition and so he backed off.

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That afternoon in his last class Harry was handed a note telling him to go to the Headmasters office that the password was sugar quills. Harry headed to the office grateful once again that he had the map from his father.

Harry hoped this was him only getting a talking to because of baiting Draco. He wasn't sure what he would do if it was more. He did know that he didn't plan on looking in the Headmaster's eyes, pendant from his mum notwithstanding. Harry had only managed a couple of chapters of his occlumency texts but he'd learned that much. He got to the gargoyle guarding the office and said "Sugar quills" he rode the stairway up and settled to wait for the headmaster taking his charms book out so he could study while he waited.

Ten minutes later the Headmaster summoned him. Harry took a deep breath and mentally girded himself to face the lions. "You summoned me Headmaster." 'Headbastard more like.'

Albus was curious. Normally students summoned to his office were unable to retain their curiosity at his many nick-knacks and they broadcasted their emotions loudly, fear was common after all he was both the Great Albus Dumbledore and the Headmaster but Harry was outwardly very self-contained. He had come, eyes forward if slightly down, to just in front of his desk. "Would you care for a lemon sherbet Harry?"

"No thank you." 'My Aunt taught me never to accept candy from strangers, and they don't get much stranger than you.'

The Headmaster decided to scan him, Harry was afraid, distrustful, and wouldn't meet his eyes. Albus glanced over at Fawkes, to his surprise the bird seemed very interested in the boy. "Perhaps you would like some tea? Yesterday you said a few things that troubled me and I feel we need to get to know each other. Have a seat."

Controlling a desire to grimace Harry sat. He was surprised a second later when a large bird with red and gold plumage flew over and landed in his lap. When he got over his shock, he stroked the bird lightly, and it responded by trilling softly. Harry couldn't help it; he relaxed slightly.

Albus felt a sudden surge of relief. Despite Harry's placement in Slytherin he clearly couldn't be dark, Fawkes wouldn't have gone to him if he was. "Fawkes likes you."

"I like him, or is it her, too."

"Yesterday you baited Mr. Malfoy quite badly. It was poorly done of you, I know you grew up away from the magical world but there will be political repercussions because of your actions."

'Like I care, and whose fault is it I grew up away from the magical world anyway.' "Like I care, Malfoy's been asking for a set down for weeks. Screwing up my potions, he was messing with my grades. Insults fine, I'll ignore it but I draw the line when he started doing that. Someone needed to take the poncey git down a few pegs."

"I see. I quite agree, but surely there could have been another solution. Speaking with Professor Snape perhaps."

Harry couldn't help himself he snorted. "Professor Snape? You have got to be kidding. Professor, I will treat you as if you don't exist, if you irritate me by making me notice you I'll throw you in detention, speak to him? You got to be out of your ruddy tree! I've had detention all day both days of just about every weekend since one month into school because that..." Harry just barely stopped himself from calling the man an epithet. He collected himself then continued, "because that man has the maturity of a two year old and has a

grudge against a man that has been dead a decade. He practically has me under house arrest and tries to tell me who I can and can't be friends with. Speak with Professor Snape, now that's a laugh. Besides I promised Malfoy the next time he attacked me I was going to hand him his ass, and I have every intention of following through."

"I see." Albus sadly did see. It appeared many things had gone wrong with Harry not just his sorting. "Mr. Malfoy's punishment is he can only do magic in the presence of a teacher for the next two years and he isn't allowed offensive spells of any kind until fifth year." He sipped his tea and noticed Harry hadn't touched his tea or the biscuit he'd placed on Harry's plate. He stood and retrieved a package from a cupboard. "There is your father's cloak. I had intended to return it to you at Christmas."

'Gifting me with my own belongings no doubt. Trying to engender warm feelings towards you and the magical world.' "Thank you. I suppose I won't beat the snot out of the little ponce, it wouldn't be cricket if he's not allowed to fight back."

"I am curious how you found out about your birth position in our world."

"A letter to me from my mother, left with the goblins to be given to me on my eleventh birthday along with my heir's ring."

"May I inquire what else was in the letter."

"My correspondence is private." Harry was tired of this. It was time to end this but it had to be ended by Dumbledore or he would lose ground he couldn't afford to lose to the old man. "The goblins told me you were the one to seal my parents cottage that night. Did you retrieve any mementos or valuables first?"

"No, I didn't want for souvenir seekers to gain access."

"I wonder how many of my things are ruined now because of that decision. I wonder if my mother or father kept a journal..." Harry cast a covert glance at the Headmaster.

Albus found himself in the undesirable position feeling guilty. That night he hadn't thought about the points Harry had just brought up. He grimaced, time to end this. "I'm sorry. Perhaps I can take you

there during the Easter recess and we can see what we can salvage. But back to the matter at hand. Given you were the injured party and the unjust detentions already served, I think we shall let this matter go this time shall we? In the future if there is a problem with Mr. Malfoy you should seek out myself or the Deputy Headmistress."

"I will." "When pigs fly. Like I am supposed to trust you, a man that would leave a baby on a doorstep in November, and woman who couldn't be bothered to fulfill the death wishes of two people that trusted her.'

"Enjoy the rest of your day Harry." Albus dismissed him calmly, and thought to himself that went well. He wouldn't have been nearly as sanguine had he seen the expression on Harry's face as he exited past the gargoyles.

Chapter 11 November

In Kent, Augusta Longbottom wasn't sure who she was more disgusted with her grandson or her old friend Minerva McGonagall. She looked out the dining room window at the mid November landscape and sipped the tea the house elves brought her.

Neville was so shy and he would be easy pickings for people who wanted to use him. That the Potter heir had made such a strong impression on Neville on the train didn't say a lot either way for the boy. That he stayed with Neville said that a) either he wasn't a strong wizard and wanted to have easy followers his being in Slytherin might indicate this; or b) he was exactly what he presented himself to Neville as, a lonely boy connecting to the one discernible tie he had concrete record of. Augusta unlike many witches and wizards didn't assume all Slytherins were dark. One of her favorite cousins who had had a dismal home life had been in Slytherin, Josephine had been cunning because she'd had to be. It was possible the Potter heir was like that, his behavior after the train ride seemed to indicate this. Augusta wanted to meet him herself before making a final decision.

She was disgusted that Neville was writing to her asking how he should help his friend. She wanted to tell him if he's your friend stand up and be counted as such and tell everyone else they should stick their opinions where the sun didn't shine. Longbottoms stood up for what they believed they didn't give into pressure. But Neville had come out of the attack on his parents so traumatized, Augusta believed he had suppressed his own magic due to fear of what magic had done to his parents. She'd wanted to kill her brother in law, Algernon, when he'd dropped Neville out the third story window and forced him to display his magic. She never could see what her sister Enid saw in that man. Thank Merlin the two of them didn't reproduce. But Neville had made it into Hogwarts, and much to her surprise into Gryffindor. Which meant the boy had to have the courage to live up to the family name in him somewhere. But he was so infernally shy and retiring it quite drove her out of patience especially when Minerva's letters informed her the boy was being bullied and he was letting it happen.

Minerva, there was another rub. They'd been year mates eons ago. Minerva was foolish, always was, always would be. She was the quintessential Gryffindor lead with her heart not her head. Stand up

for her beliefs but never ask if they're the right ones. Minerva had ignored the proper match her parents had arranged for her. John Peasgood had eventually married another. Why? Because Minerva McGonagall ignored the gossip of the older folks about the handsome, charismatic, heroic, young (comparatively at the time) transfiguration teacher and fell in love. A love she was still waiting to have returned. Minerva had as an impressionable second year fallen stupidly, irreversibly in love with Albus Dumbledore.

The man had never recognized it, never appreciated it, but took almost full advantage of it anyway. As a teacher he had impressed upon Minerva how wonderful her talent with transfiguration was. He had mentored her all the way through her mastery. Because he was a teacher she became one. Even now sixty years later Minerva waited, doing whatever task he assigned to her, wanting words of love from Albus Dumbledore although she had confessed to Augusta "I don't think he sees me that way. But he appreciates me, and I mean more to him than any other woman." Minerva seemed content with that. August still couldn't fathom why her old friend put up with it. Instead of being the cat of her animagus and demanding to be worshiped and adored, the woman was a spaniel kick me and I'll come and cringe at your feet where that man was concerned. Especially since the man in question took advantage of her friend and had her do a good share of the work that by rights should be his and she never stood up to him even if he was wrong.

Augusta didn't kid herself many in the wizarding world thought the sun shone from Albus' backside, her own son had made that mistake. Granted he had ended the conflict with Grindelwald. Granted He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had feared him. He was the most powerful sorcerer alive at the moment. He always reasoned everything out but kept information that others could use to himself. He said he always believed in second chances but he wasn't above holding what he knew about others over their heads to make them do as he wished. He wielded vast political power but he was a user not a giver. He played the political games and said the right words and easily fooled most wizards. Of course most wizards were fools.

As headmaster, Albus had the services of Fawkes, which made most people believe the bird was his familiar. She knew better, one of her ancestors had been Headmaster. Phineas Black and Armando Dippet had been such dark wizards Fawkes had retreated to the forbidden forest, but Fawkes was tied loosely to the

Headmaster position and only a few knew it. Fawkes had left the school before and returned when a "light enough" headmaster was named to the position.

Albus wasn't all bad he had good intentions. He made an error common to people of great intelligence and ability, he thought that because others weren't as intelligent or skillful he didn't need to consult them never mind that they would be affected by the decisions he would make as well. She had seen enough of his methods she didn't entirely trust him, of course the same could be said of ninety-five percent or more of the ministry. Albus talked a good talk but he was very little action. He preferred to move behind the scenes as he put it. He talked equality for the muggleborn but there was next to no action to make that a reality. He talked inter house unity. Well if what was happening to Neville was anything to go by the Headmaster was just as much action on that topic.

Minerva was asking her to tell Neville to discard his friendship with Potter. Well it might make Minnie's job easier, but a little hardship is good for the soul. She couldn't in good conscience do that when there was the matter of a life debt between the boys, and who knew, it might be just the ticket to bring Neville out of his shell and into the sort of man he'd need to be to become the next Earl of Longbottom. Frank hadn't even gotten the chance to get comfortable with the title and take his seat in the Wizengamot before he and Alice were stricken.

Augusta pondered how could she meet young Mr. Potter. She finally decided to do something she hadn't done since her husband died seventeen years ago. Longbottom Abbey would host a Yuletide Ball and house party over Christmas. Well she'd better get to work, because a party like that would take a lot of work.

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In Surrey, Petunia sat sipping her tea and looking out the window into the late November rain. It was lonely without the boys here. She stayed busy with her ladies aid meetings and her bridge group, but lately she was wanting more. She had taken to volunteering at Surrey General Hospital two mornings a week and had joined her local ballet studio for two additional classes a week. It was moments like this she truly cursed the name Albus Dumbledore. If it weren't for him she would have a larger house to keep her busy and she

would have a child or maybe even two or three to care for. Caring for the house was so easy a half hour to an hour a day and it was done now she faced boredom until Vernon came home three hours from now.

Suddenly she noticed an owl flying in the rain. She opened the window and allowed the creature to perch on the back of a kitchen chair normally they waited on the branch of a tree outside but not with this rain. She moved to the cabinet under the sink where she kept a small container of food for them. After removing the parchment attached to its leg she put the dual dish with water and food in front the bird and stepped into the laundry closet for a ragged old towel to help dry it and then put under the bird. It would do to ease cleanup if it had an accident. Petunia had noticed however, the owls that came in general seemed to know not to do their business in her house.

The ward analysis by the goblins showed that in addition to blood based protective wards, that prevented any witches or wizard who had the intent to draw the blood of anyone who lived in the house's blood from getting in the wards included a mail ward that prevented mail directed to Harry from getting through without a special "key", and a compulsion ward to make them stay in the wards for the most part. Harry sent his beautiful snowy owl at least once a week with notes to her and to retrieve mail sent to Harry via Petunia (a simple solution to the problem) from both Gringott's and Davies, Corner, and Ogden. Usually the birds came shortly after Vernon left in the mornings but sometimes it was mid afternoon. The afternoon ones almost always left again before Vernon got home. She didn't care for the creatures except for Harry's , but she didn't blame them for the magical world's oddities. She opened the parchment.

Dear Mrs Dursley,

We have examined the holdings of various companies that were basically in stasis following the deaths of the Potters. Sadly two have gone belly up, there are five more that I recommend selling off even though it will be a loss. Four others are breaking even, that I would perhaps recommend additional investment in, I believe they could become quite the moneymakers. The rest are producing a tidy profit and are sound investments. That I believe sums up the financial aspects of what I know and am working on. By the way the goblins concur with this strategy.

That is not the limits of Lord Potter's concerns however. I believe it would be a good idea for the wills to be read during the winter break. Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent are being obstructive and by getting the wills open we can yank their teeth thus taking control of the Potter concerns. This should be easy with the help of Barchok.

The Potters have a seat on the Wizengamot. The wizarding equivalent of parliament. It is currently being held and voted by Albus Dumbledore. If as you have indicated he wasn't the Potter's choice of Guardian, that means as physical guardian for the last ten years you would have some say in who held and voted that seat for Lord Potter. Harry will not be eligible until after his twenty-fifth birthday to actually vote that seat. My firm has ties to the Honorable Tiberius Ogden, as you can probably tell from the name. He is a respected Elder of the Wizengamot who while undeniably light is a contemporary of Dumbledore, and is therefore known for occasionally taking a stand counter to that of the Chief Warlock. Furthermore the Honorable Elder Ogden was a friend of the current Lord Potter's grandfather, if we can wrest control from the Chief Warlock I would recommend asking him to vote the Potter seat as he knows the the issues before the Wizengamot best.

Please owl me the details of what Harry's plans are for the winter break as his presence is required for the will reading. Also my wife was wanting to invite Lord Potter and yourself to a solstice dinner party December 21st. It would be good for Lord Potter to meet a few of the people we are corresponding about.

Cordially , Stephen M. Corner

Petunia went to the drawer where she kept the large sheets of impervious parchment and pulled a sheet of it out in addition to her personalized lilac stationary that Harry and Dudley had given her last Christmas. She wrote her response on her stationary.

Dear Mr. Corner,

That is good news. Harry was planning to stay at school over the winter holidays as the rest of us are spending them with my sister-in-law. The two of them have never gotten along and Marge's dogs have always made Harry miserable. Perhaps however we should make alternate arrangements for him to come to Gringott's for a day,

and make arrangements for him to attend your wife's party as well. Although I would be there for the will reading I have to decline for the party, I would trust you to look after him. As to Harry's family seat, I would like to meet Honorable Elder Ogden before making such an important decision.

Sincerely, Petunia Dursley

Then she took out the special pen and ink Harry had bought for her to use with the parchment and wrote: Mr. Stephen Corner c/o Davies, Corner and Ogden. She then folded and sealed the parchment around the sheet of her stationary. Before tying it back on the owl and opening the window.

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Harry put the final touches on his painting of Hogwarts. There were only two weeks of fall term left Christmas was almost here. He hoped Aunt Petunia liked the painting. He was careful to omit the few details that made it clear Hogwarts was a magic castle but put enough in that he was granting her childhood wish to see Hogwarts for herself. He had also bought a refill of the stationary he and Dudley had got her last year since it had been a hit. He spent quite some time considering what to get the rest of his family for Christmas before buying. He'd ordered some gold cufflinks and shirt studs for Vernon and had gotten four tickets to a boxing match for Dudley. He was torn between ignoring Marge (his preference) and sending a simple charcoal sketch of Ripper that he'd mounted and matted. If he sent the sketch he'd please everyone (except possibly Marge). He'd decided to get Neville the Gift certificate from Lillywhites he'd spoken of months ago. Hermione was going to get a copy of Helga's Guide Of Do's and Don'ts for Young Witches and Wizards. After careful consideration Harry decided to get Hagrid a book about dragon care. Not because he liked the man, so much as because Hagrid was the one who gifted him with Hedwig. Harry decided on chocolate frogs for the kids in Slytherin who either he tutored or was tutored by except Flint . Flint was getting a gift certificate to Quality Quidditch Supply. He'd done his Christmas shopping through owl order or via the mail order that happened through a post service catering to muggleborns in Hogsmeade thanks to a little help from Flint.

Apparently Albus too many names Dumbledore was good for something. He'd had words with Snape and Harry was off the constant all-weekend detentions. Harry was actually getting the opportunity to do some of his supplemental studies like occlumency. This was what a weekend was supposed to be. But like all things it had to come to an end. Two things happened the next day there was a signup to stay at school for the holidays and Harry got a dozen owls.

Harry had gotten the occasional owl order package, the mail forwarded to him via Aunt Petunia mostly from Gringott's telling him or asking about the odd business matter, and once a month he got a letter in return for his weekly letters to Aunt Petunia. So he was shocked when a dozen Owls lined up in front of him with parchments. Uneasy he started to remove them Tracy and Daphne helped him. He eyed the pile of parchments uneasily. He knew the mail wards of Hogwarts should prevent anything very harmful from coming through but he was sure he didn't know that many people in the wizarding world beyond the walls of Hogwarts. He tucked the parchments into his bag he'd figure them out in history, then tucked into his breakfast.

In History Harry set his dicta-quill to writing what Binns said. Then he slowly went through his pile. One of the first things he noticed was that unlike most wizarding correspondence most of these had envelopes a typical wizarding letter was a folded into twelfths parchment that had been sealed with wax. Envelopes usually meant large multipage letters, or formal invitations. Or worst case scenario something harmful enclosed. Harry looked through to see if he could find anything familiar about any of the envelopes. Well one of them had a seal with Longbottom under it, that one was probably safe, another had Corner that one too was likely safe.

By the end of class Harry had opened all the parchments, and was surprised to find himself the recipient of several invitations. One was from the Longbottoms for a Yuletide ball and House party , and one was for a winter Solstice Banquet and was from the Corners. The remainder were from people he didn't know and wouldn't even consider saying yes to, those invitations were to the Boy-Who-Lived and from people he had never met. Harry's largest issue with all of them was he had planned to stay at school. The solstice dinner was the 21st and Longbottom Party was the 24th through the 1st, Harry really wanted to go to both but he also knew that his Aunt and Uncle

would be at Marge's the 20th through the 2nd, Hogwarts was ending the 18th and the Express ran the 19th returning the 5th of January with classes resuming the 6th. There the added difficulty of although Harry had a wizarding wardrobe sufficient to school and he could cover dressing appropriately for a dinner party doing so for a ball and week long house party was a bit beyond its capacity. He really wanted to go to the party at Neville's and he knew he needed to start making connections in the magical world the party at the Corners would be a good place to start. But how to do it? Harry supposed he'd better start by contacting his Aunt.

Chapter 12 The Wills

Stephen Corner smiled at Anna, his partner Horace Ogden's secretary, as she waved him into his partner's office for their weekly informational meeting.

Davies, Corner, and Odgen had been founded at the beginning of the last war. The three had been roommates in Ravenclaw the three had worked together to become a truly top notch legal firm. Perseus Davies specialized in tax and international business law. Stephen Corner specialized in family law and trust structuring, with both overlapped in general business law and Horace Ogden handled the barrister side of the firm.

Six months ago they had expanded the services they offered into estate planning and management. What had driven that decision was that Stephen's wife Felicia was sending the last of their four children to Hogwarts that year. Felicia was muggleborn and her parents had a similar business in the muggle world. The three solicitors had actually found themselves needing to hire several more witches and wizards to keep up with the demand on their new services. Which oddly enough seemed to stem from tension with the goblins, yet the firm itself was on extremely good terms with the goblins. Getting the Potter Estate under their guidance was a coup achieved with the help of the goblins that could and hopefully would raise them high in the magical world. The use of the Potter name for promotion had been done for years throughout the magical community but the apparent lack of legal permission or reimbursement for doing so, was giving their firm grounds to go after large scale recompense. The Potter estate was quite large to begin with and just in the four months they had been working with the goblins and the guardian of Lord Potter it had grown forty percent and the firms income had doubled.

Felicia entered, followed by Perseus.

Horace's bass rumble started the meeting. "Good we're all here. I'll start. The Wizengamot is still dragging it's feet in the matter of the Potter will however all the maneuvering of the Chief Warlock and his allies has come to naught, I got a judges' triad to bring the Writ Lord Potter and his Aunt filed before the Wizengamot. Dumbledore was fooling himself if he honestly believed the Wizengamot would overrule that Writ which due to the Treaty of 1679 has to be honored

or another Goblin war begins. The goblins want to schedule it the morning of the 20th. Lord Potter will have to be present at 10 a.m. In the Gringott's Will Reading Room."

Perseus' light baritone said "That's excellent. We are presently unable to progress with any of the legal issues due to a battle of injunctions with Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle, and Trent. The usual he said, she said, sort of thing which by forcing the wills into the open we'll be able to put a halt to. Felicia has been good enough to look up tax records to get an evaluation of the Godric's Hollow property a few more bits and pieces and we'll be able to choke a few of those old warhorses who thought nothing of stealing from orphans. We'll have to have clear rights to pursue suits with the Ministry, Dumbledore, Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent, and the various publishers, though we are mostly certain Dumbledore had no rights to do what he did, we have to have proof which can only come from the will. Other than that, the import export contracts that the Benchleys had us work up with the firm in India are done. And I can believe how ensnared in chaos the Hopkins files were. I can't believe that whole family didn't step in and help old Fustus when his mind started to drift- fifteen years, insanity. The Ministry is costing them a pretty penny in bribes not to toss them all in jail for failure to pay their taxes but another week and it should be sorted. I've done my best to suggest they should keep us on and utilize Felicia's services."

"Why thank you for that sterling recommendation, Perseus. My department is humming along quite nicely. Gerard and Bethany have finally finished their training, so our workday should cease running to overtime. But now it sounds like I'll need to hire a few more or I'll be back to working twelve hour days. I hope to meet Lord Potter and his Aunt at the party or sooner so we can coordinate exactly what he wishes to have happen with his properties but that will have to wait until after the 19th. I know things slow down in my part of the office until the new year and I plan to take full advantage. Michael and Adrianna will be back from Hogwarts and Charity and Rich are coming from Germany. It's a shame that Steve and Kelly aren't able to get away from their dig in Peru."

"Yes, Felicia, we all realize how you dote on our family and are looking forward to them being here for the holidays."

"Well if you're going to be like that Stephen I won't tell you what I learned just today."she said. An unspoken sing song of I know

something you don't know was in her voice. All three men knew that Felicia's uncanny ability to pluck bits of gossip from random conversation and put it together with other information usually from legal and financial sources was one of the reasons for their firm's success even before she officially became part of the firm.

Horace wanted to snicker. Felicia had been leading Stephen a merry dance since their first year at Hogwarts. When they were younger all three of the men had competed for her up until fifth year when she got sick of it and put all of them in their place pointing out they were boys and she would only ever be interested in a man. Stephen had been the first one to figure out what she meant and the two got married just out of Hogwarts. Horace and Perseus had both figured out they were better off with the witches their families wanted them to marry if only because their wives were content to be homemakers. Felicia had always worked at least part time in their office. Having her in the office now meant things were going better than the three men had ever dreamed. "So what delightful piece of information have you for us."

"You know how the Malfoy Party on Boxing Day has been considered the must see and be seen event of the holiday season for the last five years?" The men nodded. "This year that role has been supplanted. The Countess of Longbottom is Holding a Yuletide ball and house party. Invitees to the ball portion include most all the Wizengamot, most the ministry, virtually all year mates of Lady Longbottom and-

"And-

"All the heads of families of the old and honorable sort or higher minus the Malfoys and their ilk but including Lord Potter."

"Is anyone from our firm invited?" Stephen asked.

"That's the sad part, I don't know. But if we are we should know by next week apparently the only invites that have been sent so far are the ones that are for the people invited to both the ball and the house party."

"Alice was a Davies before she married Frank Longbottom, we're likely on the guest list." Perseus said.

"Well that's very interesting." Horace looked thoughtful. "How did you know Lord Potter is on the guest list?"

"He's invited to the house party. I found out talking to the post service "

"Indeed, very interesting." Stephen was thoughtful for a moment. Then he shook himself. "Well I completed the wills and trust structures that came in but my time has been split between research for Felicia, routine family law stuff, wills and whatnot for the few walk ins and research for Horace. Nothing terribly interesting or exciting."

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Albus Dumbledore couldn't help but frown. The Wizengamot was disinclined to maintain the seal on the Potter wills the goblins had the audacity to demand be opened. He couldn't find the keys he knew he had somewhere to Harry's vaults. He figured he could earn some trust by handing them over. He'd heard rumors that the solicitor's office of Davies, Corner and Ogden had filed that they were the solicitor for the Potter estate but that couldn't be right because Albus had assigned that task to Dadelus Diggle and his old friend Elphais Doge's law firm. He was slowly being driven mad by Fudge's constant demands for advice. There were problems with the ICW and now he had to leave for Geneva while there were all these bloody problems with Harry.

Harry being sorted into the wrong house. Harry not falling in with his plans. Harry being entirely too willing to commit violence. Harry making friends with the Slytherins.

Molly being annoyed with Albus and sending him a howler. Because her children almost missed the train, because she was looking for a child that apparently had no trouble on his own, and because it was clear he had chosen poorly in his choice of guardians for the poor boy or he wouldn't have been sorted into Slytherin. James and Lily surely were rolling in their graves because of his mistake. Molly had told him years ago and now it was poor little Harry reaping what Albus sowed. Muggles raising him indeed.

Filius and Minerva seemed of like mind with Molly because they refused all offers of lemon sherberts, biscuits and tea, and would only discuss school related topics. It was quite downheartening.

Even Severus had taken the boy's placement poorly, all those detentions and grounding him to Slytherin house following the troll incident.

About the only good news he'd had since school started was that Fawkes liked Harry quite a bit, and that Harry had proven quite capable when faced with the troll. That he had not deserted his two Gryffindor friends also said good things.

Albus preferred not to think too hard about what the true significance of the Troll incident was. Albus' plans to challenge and test the boy weren't going well either. Harry showed absolutely no curiosity about the third floor Albus had had students, at least a few from every house, investigate the corridor but was Harry Potter among them no. He was proving an able student, but displayed no desire to investigate the mystery. Albus had high hopes the week that Mr. Longbottom and Miss Granger discovered it, figuring they would tell Harry but aside from looking into the newspaper about the break-in he ignored the presence of the stone. His plans to have Hagrid drop a clue or two would come to nothing because Hagrid who before had seemingly adored Harry, steered clear of the boy since his sorting. Perhaps he should have a conversation with Hagrid where the boy or better his friends could overhear it. Perhaps he would add another layer of security to the stone, the main trick would be how to expose Harry to it beforehand, perhaps over the Christmas break.

But all of Albus' plans for the holiday came to nothing because he and Harry weren't there.

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After a half dozen trips for Hedwig to Surrey and back Petunia and Harry came up with a plan for the holiday. Harry came back on the Hogwarts Express with all the other students. He stayed with Petunia overnight. The next day his Aunt escorted him to London for the will reading. After the will reading the plan was for Harry to go to the Potter apartment in London under the care of the elves, while Petunia would take the train to Marge's. He would go to the Corners for their solstice party and to the Longbottom's via the floo in the apartment. Libby would go with him to the Longbottom party to act as a guardian as well as a servant. When the Longbottom party ended Harry would return to the apartment in London until the fifth when he would return to school on the express.

Plan in place Harry took his end of autumn trimester tests and brought his homework with him on board the express. On the day between his arrival home and the will reading, Harry completed his holiday homework. Harry and Petunia also saw to a couple small issues, Harry's gifts for his hosts and hostesses.

His first dilemma was what to get for the people who invited him to their parties. He had only met Mr. Corner once and he had never met his wife so the question was what would they like. In the end Harry bought a nice pair of winter gloves for Mrs. Corner and on his uncle's advice and with his help a nice bottle of Courvoiser for Mr. Corner. Oddly enough it was his gift to Neville's Gran, the Dowager Countess of Longbottom, that was the easiest to decide, and the most time-consuming to complete. Harry painted a picture of Neville in one of the moments when Neville had accomplished a spell. Harry in his mind's eye caught Neville's glow of accomplishment and transferred it to canvas.

Harry's second dilemma was his wardrobe, if wizarding society was anything like Victorian Society at a high class house party he would be expected to change clothes at least three times a day, but Harry had no clue as to what was appropriate and even his etiquette book was no help. In his few months in the wizarding world he had made a few decisions about his wardrobe. One he hated the basic dresses that were wizarding robes. Although he didn't mind the long flowing lines and the bit of swish the long length provided, he did mind the having to hike the skirt to safely climb the stairs. Not to mention the fact the skirts weren't full enough for the kicks he liked for defense. He usually wore trousers and a shirt under his robes but that only went so far. As he thought about fashions from other countries and other eras and he had gotten a few ideas of things he could adapt that would make him blend in on the surface while still granting his own preferences. His first day home he used Dudley's computer to get some patterns for clothes he liked. He planned to use the days between the will reading and the house party to fix his wardrobe dilemma.

Finally the day of the will reading arrived. The will reading room was oddly empty of people. Barchok, Mr. Corner, Harry, Aunt Petunia, and a ministry clerk were the only people there. Petunia was monitoring the time, and Harry had his trunk and his owl with him.

Barchok grunted, "Let's get started." Then he broke the wax seal on the document.

"This is the last will and testament of James Charlus Potter, this document revokes any previous wills and codicils. I freely and willingly and by my own determination declare that in the event of my death I wish for my property to be disbursed in the following way. Personal items of clothing, jewelry, journals, letters and memorabilia is distributed to the following people in the following order. My wife, my son Harry James Potter, my friends Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Peter Pettigrew, and Frank Longbottom. The entailed Potter property, money, family titles, and Wizengamot seat goes to my son and heir, Harry James Potter. Unentailed property money, stocks, is split distributed the following manner sixty percent to my wife Lily Elizabeth Evans-Potter, fifteen percent to my son, Harry James Potter, ten percent to Remus John Lupin, five percent Sirius Orion Black, five percent Petter Augustus Pettigrew. Five percent to charities to be determined by Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore with only the instruction do good with it sir. In the event I die before my son and heir is of age Custody of him and his Wizengamot seat shall pass as follows first to my wife Lily Elizabeth Potter, then to my best friend and Harry's godfather Sirius Orion Black. If he is unable to do so Harry's godmother Alice Jane Longbottom, and if she is unable then to a woman I trust is responsible enough to see the job done Minerva Eloise McGonagall. As per Potter tradition the financial trustee for Harry until he reaches full majority at twenty one shall be Gringott's Bank and Trust. Harry will have supervised access to the Potter Vault at age eighteen. His physical guardian shall be paid a stipend of one hundred and fifty galleons a month. For food, clothing, education, medical care, and a small allowance. His financial trustee shall be paid ten percent of the investment return on the Potter holdings instead of the normal eight. His trust vault will become open to him at age eleven to pay all school related expenses and allow for a broom purchase every three years after his first year. The family seat on the Wizengamot shall either be voted by his guardian or by someone designated by his guardian. I rely on first Sirius Black as executor and if not Sirius then Frank Longbottom to carry out my last wishes. Any expenses that occur in carrying out these wishes shall be paid by the estate not to exceed more than two percent of the total value of my estate.

Signed on this day September 1st, 1980

James Charlus Potter

Witnessed by Edgar Albert Bones

Delores Umbridge, Court clerk

"Any questions?" Barchok asked.

"Several, ones you can answer at this time not really."commented Harry.

"Shall we go on to Lily Potter's will?"

Nods of assent met his question.

"This is the last will and testament of Lily Elizabeth Potter nee Evans, this document revokes any previous wills or codicils. I freely, willingly, and by my own determination declare that in the event of my death I wish for my property to be distributed the following way. Personal items of clothing are to be given to charity. Journals are to be given to my son Harry James Potter. Letters and photos go to my husband James Charlus Potter. The contents of my personal vault # 2626 go to my son Harry James Potter and my jewelry is divided as follows, my wedding band and engagement ring to my husband, the jewelry in my personal vault to my son and the contents of my jewelry box in the cottage that are not listed in the Potter entailment go to my sister Petunia Genevieve Dursley nee Evans. In the event that my husband and I both died before our son was of age I name Sirius Orion Black to be his legal guardian with full rights and responsibilities. If he is unable I name Alice Jane Longbottom, likewise with full rights and responsibilities. If neither of them is available Harry is to be placed with Minerva Eloise McGonagall the head of Gryffindor house and transfiguration professor at Hogwarts with full rights and responsibilities. I name Kyle Larsten, my solicitor, as executor. Any expenses to carry out these wishes not to exceed five percent of the value of the estate will be paid by the estate.

Signed this day August 1st 1980

Lily Elizabeth Potter nee Evans

Witnessed by Kyle Bertrand Larsten

Algernon Croaker Ministry Representative D.O.M.

"This concludes the reading of the Potter wills." Barchok said.

The ministry representative made copies of both wills then headed back to the Ministry.

Stephen Corner thought carefully about both wills. "I see one potential problem. Minerva McGonagall is named third guardian in both wills. It's completely fixable, we merely file for a challenge in guardianship based on her failure to follow through."

"But how would she have known she was listed third?" Harry asked.

"Your parents would have asked if she was willing before putting her in the wills."

Petunia was quiet. Here it was grounds to hand the boy over to someone else and wash her hands of it. She looked down at her hands twisted in her lap.

Harry was scared. He knew enough to know this gave his aunt legal grounds to hand him off to another person. Never mind the woman in question was a prejudiced dried up old prune that thought Dumbledore was a god. He muttered an internal prayer. He knew his relatives didn't like him, but they treated him mostly fair and he always knew what to expect from them; what they wanted from him.

Petunia thought carefully about the choice she was about to make. She knew from Harry's letters while at school the McGonagall woman was Dumbledore's lapdog. Her thin lips tightened, yes she now had legal grounds to pass Harry to someone else, but she hadn't come this far in her revenge against the old man to hand Harry over to someone else. "File it. I haven't spent the last ten years raising my nephew to hand him over to a woman who was stupid enough to endanger a toddler by letting someone else leave him on a doorstep. Barchok, do you have Harry's portkey to the Potter apartment?"

The Goblin handed a silver and gold bracelet to Harry "Touch the gold spots and say Potter Place. The elves are waiting, floo is connected for exiting and calls but warded against entry. The portkey is the only way through the wards you should be safe enough."

"Good, Harry I need to leave or I'll miss my train. Be good listen to Mr. Corner while you're at the party. Mr. Corner pleasure as always. Thank you for the work you and your partners do. If there is paperwork for me to sign owl it to me, I'll sign and owl it back immediately. Harry don't open the gifts from us until Christmas day alright? Mind your manners when you go to the Longbottoms and I'll see you when school's out." She headed out.

Mr. Corner found Harry's expression sightly odd. He would have described it as one part shocked delight and two parts amazed relief although why the boy had gotten that expression in response to his aunt's words he didn't know. The relationship between Lord Potter and his aunt was just strange. He never would have let any of his children be alone with house elves for a holiday but both of them seemed perfectly comfortable with it. "Well young Lord Potter how about you come with me to the office and we can see about getting all the paperwork connected to fulfilling these wills started."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Corner?"

"Yes?"

"Do you know who I should talk to about a proper wardrobe for a ball and house party? I have a dress robe that should work for your party but..."

"I know just the person."

Chapter 13 Days Before Christmas

Felicia Corner was ready to box her children's ears. Here they were enjoying the benefits of the firm's increased income and they were bad-mouthing the source of that income. Adrianana and Michael both were eager to relate all the stories they had experienced or heard from the other students about Lord Potter and in true gossip fashion Felicia doubted even a tenth was true.

Felicia had been one of those students offered a choice. Despite her muggle birth the Hat had strongly considered Slytherin for her. Together by a narrow margin she and the Hat figured she would be better off in Ravenclaw, but as result she really disliked judging people based on their house. And what her children were doing was bashing Lord Potter because he was in Slytherin instead of one of the other houses. Much more of this and she was going to explode. The floo chimed.

On seeing her husband's head she snapped, "Yes."

"Felicia I have a young man in my office that desperately needs your expertise. I just have paperwork that I can just as easily do there if you are willing to leave the children."

"Given I'm almost ready to strangle those said children I'd be delighted my love." She went to the kitchen where the children were making cookies with their oldest sister. "I'm stepping out to the office your father is coming home and bringing paperwork with him try to keep it down to a dull roar."

"Okay Mum. I'll keep an eye on these brats." Charity spoke softly. Charity had been in Hufflepuff, despite having two Ravenclaw parents, and she could see her Mum was losing her patience.

Felicia stepped through to her husbands office. Stephen was quick to perform introductions. "Lord Potter may I present my better half and wife Felicia Corner. Felicia, Lord Harry James Potter."

Harry was quick to extend his hand. "A pleasure, Mrs. Corner." She placed her hand in his and he was quick to place an appropriate kiss on its back.

"The pleasure is mine Lord Potter."

"I know it's proper for you both to call me Lord Potter because of my title but I would be much more comfortable with Harry."

"If you wish Harry." Stephen was quick to say. "My love, Harry needs advice on a proper wardrobe for the Longbottom house party could you..?"

"I'd be delighted."

She led Harry to a small restaurant where they could eat lunch and she could get an idea of what would suit him. He was wearing a simple robe in gunmetal gray that was quite unremarkable but despite the austere color it seemed to suit him completely. They spoke extensively about wizarding fashion for the entirety of their lunch and it was halfway through when Harry broached what he wanted. Felicia was astounded. Over her years in the magical world she had grown used to the fashions, appalling as they were. Her mother-in-law had drilled her extensively on society manners and dress before allowing Stephen to publicly tie himself to her. Felicia knew exactly who she wanted to take Harry to for robes. Madam Malkin made nice basic robes, Gladrags tried to appeal to the younger crowd by pulling in muggle fashions that looked like they were put together by a colorblind hippie, Twillfitt & Tattings had expensive wizarding wear that was staid and boring, but what Harry was after would require a totally different touch. Fortunately Felicia knew just the wizard.

Jack Cooper was a muggleborn wizard who lived on the borders of the magical world. He had gotten outstandings on all his OWLs but only pursued two NEWTS transfiguration and charms. After graduating Hogwarts he had gone to a muggle design school and apprenticed himself to a fashion designer in Paris. Nowadays he ran a small design studio that made dresses for rich muggles and the occasional witch or wizard.

Felicia got Jack to make all her clothes, and about a third of Stephen's. He would be perfect for this. "Are you wearing muggle clothes under your robes Harry?" Knowing that was a common habit of those that were muggle raised.

Harry nodded.

"Great." Felicia paid the check for their lunch then lead the way to the Leaky Cauldron. When they reached the doorway to muggle London, she smiled at him. "Ready?"

Harry cocked an eyebrow in question.

Felicia changed her robe to a trenchcoat, then said "Jacket?"

Harry nodded and a moment later they stepped out into muggle London and Felicia led the way to the nearest underground and they traveled to Regent Street. "I want wizarding garments with growth charms, Mrs. Corner."

"I know Harry. Jack is a wizard, but he lives in the muggle world. I think you two will get along nicely."

A half an hour later she sat back and sipped a cup of tea, while Harry and Jack argued and brainstormed about Harry's wardrobe. Her part in all of this was quite small, all she did was outlined the number and type of garments required from there it was all up to Harry and Jack. She snickered when forty five minutes later their conversation ended with a "all right then" from Jack swiftly followed by a "right then" from Harry. Both males pulled on their jackets.

"We're going somewhere?" She got to her feet.

"Felicia my love, do you see mounds of fabric here? Of course we're going out, we have to find the fabrics for this young man's wardrobe."

"I'll have to apparate us, or we'll never make the warehouses before they close." After giving coordinates to Felicia, he took hold of Harry. "Hang tight, little man."

Three hours later , the three returned exhausted to the apartment/workshop above the shop. Jack was tired but was sporting a large grin. He was very excited to do this wardrobe it was going to be rich in texture, austere in color and while from a distance it would be mistakable for normal wizarding robes up close it would be clear these were anything but normal robes. Harry had chosen japanese hakamas, long tunics, kimono style coats, and haoris as a main base for the wardrobe but he also included full skirted full length coats with and without pleats, cassock style robes with split

skirts to make movement easy, and sufi style dervish dresses. All in all, it would be a unique and hopefully trendy wizarding wardrobe. Grays, blacks, and blues dominated but there were also greens and a few dark purples, one red and gold chinese check brocade, and another navy and gold floral brocade. Brocades, velvets, and silks were the dominant fabrics but there was wool superfine, cotton in multiple weights, denim and even leather. Jack couldn't wait to get started.

He chivvied Felicia and Harry out, and told Harry he'd see him the twenty third and not to forget his vault key, he'd need it.

Harry bid Felicia a thank you and a goodbye, before activating the portkey to the apartment. Libby took one look at his tired countenance, sat him down to dinner, ran a bath for him and had him in bed asleep by eight thirty.

While his wife helped Harry with shopping Stephen Corner swiftly went through and filled out the paperwork so Minerva McGongall would never be able to claim Harry as her ward. After he sent it off to Petunia Dursley with an owl, he went to speak to his younger two children. Like his wife he had heard the comments and felt them inappropriate. "Adrianna, Michael, may I speak to you for a moment?"

"Sure Dad. What's up?"

"You two need to lose the attitude."

"What attitude?" Michael asked confused.

"The attitude that anything Slytherin is evil. It is offensive in the extreme to your mum, because were she not muggleborn she would have been in Slytherin herself. I know that attitude is a dominant one but the fact is there are a lot of Slytherins out there and many of them are not dark. Think of Healer Johnson he's been the healer for this family and a friend for a number of years right?"

"Yeah dad. He's the best pediatric healer at St. Mungo's."

"That's right he is the best healer. That was his ambition and it got him sorted into Slytherin. Outside of school there are no uniforms to tell you which house someone belongs to. You may very easily wind

up working alongside someone from Hufflepuff or Gryffindor or even Slytherin. House prejudice has no place in the working world, and frankly I'm appalled the Headmaster allows it to go on at school.

"Since you've come home you've been going off on how Harry Potter is dark because he got sorted into Slytherin. Going off about how he's nothing like the books. Gossiping about he said this or did that, did you hear him say that, did you see him do whatever he supposedly did? IF not then maybe you need to reconsider. The fact is none of the books written about him are true. Everyone basing their expectations of what he would be like, based on those books is foolishness personified. The talk that because he is a Slytherin he is evil, will cease. Lord Harry James Potter is a client, a very important client, with the potential to bring a lot of business into the firm, and he will be here for the party so I suggest you both go to your rooms and think about what I've said. Because at the party I expect you to be polite if not even welcoming to him. Is any of this in anyway unclear?"

"No sir, crystal clear." Michael and Adrianna were good kids, and seldom had they incurred their parents wrath, but it was clear on this occasion they had.

"Good."

Michael Corner sat down like his father asked and thought about what his Dad had said. Attempting to bring logic into it. He acknowledged that everyone had expected that Harry James Potter, the last of the Potters , and savior of the wizarding world would be sorted into Gryffindor as all Potters of the last four generations had been. However, Harry Potter wasn't raised by his Potter family, he was raised in the muggle world. So maybe he wasn't automatically a Gryffindor the way Weasleys were. On reflection the books published about Harry did have a rather fairy tale tone to them making it sound like he was this all powerful all knowing godlike person. Harry was just a kid even younger than Michael, and he was learning magic right alongside him. Michael looked hard at what Harry had been like in their shared classes Herbology, Astronomy, and Transfiguration. He was always polite, if a bit distant but considering how he got treated... he usually worked hard. Maybe he was Slytherin because he wanted to prove himself good at magic despite being muggle raised. He had never to Michael's experience done anything remotely dark, and he was friends with both

Longbottom, the almost squib, and Granger, a muggleborn. Maybe he should give Harry Potter another chance.

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In the two days leading up to the dinner party, Libby had taught Harry to floo using the beach house making him travel back and forth until he didn't catapult out of the fireplace. Instead he could floo with a semblance of grace, much better than his first trip when he shot out of it as if propelled out of a canon. If there was one thing this break was teaching him it was how to travel as a wizard. He no longer fell to the ground when portkeying, and he hoped he didn't stumble too badly when he flooed to the Corner's.

Between trips he spoke to the portraits of his ancestors and worked on Neville's portrait. He learned a lot of family history, and he was told of the family grimoire that was in the family vault at Gringott's. One of his great grandmothers recommended having the elves find a book of charms that were household and personal care charms. His great, great, great great-grandfather asked about what accidental magic he'd done. When he mentioned the binding Dumbledore had placed when he was five, he thought the portrait would have an apoplectic fit then and there. Then when great, great, great, great-grandfather found out that Harry had apparated both himself and his large cousin despite the bind, he promptly suggested that Harry work towards learning to do wandless magic because he probably had enough power to learn it. Harry thought about his almost summoning one of the MacLaggens wands and agreed.

The portrait that interested him the most though was that of the first Baron of Potter, Hadrian Potter. Many of the portraits had been less than happy with where Harry had been sorted. But the first Baron of Potter was thrilled about it. He told Harry the story of how the Potter family was elevated to the nobility.

Back in those days, the Potters had been gentry newly arrived with William of Normandy. His grandfather had been a margrave and a vassal to the Earl of Staffordshire. His father Ignottus Peverell had married into the very well to do but minor family of Potter, that only had a daughter on the condition that he take the family name and all the children would be Potters not Peverells. Hadrian had gone to Hogwarts and been in Slytherin, one of Salazar's own apprentices. He had loved the school, he'd actually stayed and been a Professor

of warding and defense at the school. The truth was in the early days Salazar didn't approve of muggleborns because a) their level of education was low (most could not read or write), b) they were superstitious, and c) they seldom understood proper hygiene.

Then as was somewhat common in those days, some Christians got it in their heads that the magic users among them were evil incarnate and killed most of Salazar's family including his daughter in law and firstborn grandchild that was a mere baby. Salazar had been a mage. His wife a low level witch. They had been soul bonded; most of the time when one of a soul bonded pair dies the other follows. Because of the discrepancy of power and the sudden way his wife died, he did not die, instead he went mad. Hadrian Potter had looked at his much loved master's behavior and sought immediate help from the Duke of Gryffindor. Godric Gryffindor, was the grandson of Cnut a prior King of England, whose mother a princess was given to her wizard husband as payment for preventing Dragons from destroying several shires in England. Godric took him to the William the 1st who assigned the two of them the task of putting down the insane but powerful wizard.

Godric came up with the plan, that he would get Salazar's attention and fight him, and that Hadrian would come from behind and finish him. It wasn't a plan that Hadrian liked but it was probably the only one with a chance of working. And work it did, but not before Godric was almost fatally injured. Hadrian had killed Salazar, and wound up defending himself and Godric from many of Salazar's followers. When they returned to the king, Godric's tales of Hadrian's deeds had given the Potter's the elevation to Baron, and the family motto, Pro Fidelibus. Hadrian had always felt as if he betrayed his mentor but he knew he had done the right thing. Ten years later he married one of Godric's granddaughters. And that was the start of the magical Potter family.

Early evening on the 21st Harry dressed carefully in his green velvet dress robes. He grabbed the basket holding the gifts to the Corners and their law partners. He mentally reviewed the etiquette he'd learned. He thought about the political information he hoped to gain, and created a list of who he should speak to in his mind. He periodically reminded himself that he should breathe, listen, and be calm even if things didn't go perfectly, because he was a kid and kids make mistakes, most adults wouldn't hold it against him. He checked the clock, time to go. He stepped to the fireplace threw in

his handful of floo powder when the flames turned green he stepped in and called out "Corner's Grove."

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At Corner's Grove at midnight that evening the three law partners and their spouses gathered. Stephen opened the bottle of cognac Harry had given him.

Horace joined him in sipping the muggle drink. "Not bad. Not the same kick as firewhiskey but not bad. I wonder if the gift to me and Perseus is the same."

"Perhaps." Stephen said. "Harry said his uncle recommended the gift. It is quite nice. Impressions?"

"A successful party. Having Lord Potter here, gave it a certain..." Perseus said.

"Sense of exclusiveness perhaps?" Morgana Ogden said. "He wasn't what I was expecting. I expected him to join the younger set. Not listen to Horace and Tiberius discuss Wizengamot business."

"I think he understands that when he's grown he's going to have to understand the politics, his aunt apparently gave him a solid grounding in the principles of estate management and his manners are more than acceptable." Felicia stated. "Have you noticed his dislike of the Chief Warlock?"

"Yes and I wonder the cause." Perseus wondered.

"Well we had to work for months to get the wills open. According to those he should have had no say in Lord Potter's life at all. I don't think I have all the details, but I can tell you this much based on the suits that will be filed the 23rd..." Stephen Corner explained to his partners what the goblins and Petunia Dursley had told him.

When he finished an hour and a half later, the other five people were shocked and appalled. "I think I get it now." said Horace.

"What makes it worse is I suspect there is even more waiting to be told." Stephen stated. "Harry and his aunt both know how to play their cards close to their chests."

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On the 23rd, Harry traveled to Jack Cooper's shop he was surprised that Felicia was there as well. Together they went in and saw Harry's new wardrobe.

Harry had intelligently brought his trunk with him so as things were finished and approved they were neatly stowed away.

"First morning or casual day wear." said Jack. "Your idea of long full skirted or slitted coats is perfect. I designed all of them with the idea you would probably be wearing them over trousers, shirts, and possibly jumpers. But I've also made them so from shoulders to waist they fit closely to the body, the sleeves too should fit closely. Makes them practical to work in."

Harry tried on the dozen coats. His favorites by far were the black and indigo denim ones that folded across his chest in double breasted fashion starting mid chest with the buttons ending at the waist. Both had deep full pleats resting on the front and back of the hip that when he tried; he was able to do a roundhouse kick in them.

"Now for little more formal occasions, hakamas. You've got twelve pairs that are good for almost any occasion and eight more that are more for evening or formal occasions. Tops for this part were a little trickier, so let me show you.." Harry worked his way through the mix of fifteen tops: long chinese men's gowns, long waist coats and coats worn over billowy shirts that reminded him of Georgian and Victorian clothes, kurtha of India that split at the hip that had rich embroidered patterns that formed gathers at the yoke, as well as Japanese short kimono, trying on the twelve pairs of less formal hakamas as he went.

"For tea you can go with the more formal of the hakama combinations you just tried on or you could wear one of these three dervish outfits, the dress over pants with a waist length jacket I chose the richest of the fabrics for these because they have the least detail." Of dervish dresses two were made from sand washed silk, black with a patterned silk and linen jacket, and navy with a navy and gold brocade jacket, the third was made of emerald green dupioni silk and had charcoal gray velvet jacket with narrow bands of emerald green embroidery on the cuffs and collar.

"Now for the grand finale, formal wear. Since formal wizarding wear tends to have beaucoup detail and embellishment I choose to lean heavily on the Japanese lines with multiple layers I went for texture and lush fabrics with subtle embellishment I hope you approve."

As Harry tried on, he had tried various strikes and kicks to test the movement in his new clothes and he was feeling very excited these clothes were in his mind perfect. As he tried on the last of them he asked Felicia Corner her opinion. "Mrs. Corner? What do you think?"

"I think they're fabulous, not run of the mill wizarding to be sure but enough like it I suspect you will start a new trend in wizarding fashion. Well done Jack."

"Okay. Harry all of these clothes have three size growth charms for breadth and four sizes in length. After that you'll need more clothes I figure that gives you a year and a half maybe two, possibly even three before you'll need more unless you hit your growth spurt early. All of them have comfort charms, you will stay the temperature as if you were in comfortable twenty degrees Centigrade room regardless of how many layers you wear or if the sun is pouring down or if it's cold. All of them have self pressing charms and dirt repellent charms but I do recommend actually washing them about every third time you wear them it helps them last longer. The price for this little shopping extravaganza is 2879 galleons."

Harry mentally calculated that in pounds and inwardly winced. But for a custom tailored wardrobe with the spells allowing him to wear them for that long he supposed that was actually quite reasonable. So he wrote the draft on his trust vault rounding it up to 2900 since Jack had put it together so quickly. He handed him the draft, and after saying goodbye to both Jack and Felicia, he portkeyed back to the apartment.

A/N: hakamas are the full almost skirt like trousers martial artists wear, Haori are jackets of traditional Japanese design, Kataginu are a between a cloak and a vest that Samurai wore. Obi are a belt.

Chapter 14 The Longbottom Ball

There were times Albus Dumbledore hated holding so many roles in the wizarding world. He had missed the end of autumn term feast thereby missed the chance to wish his students a good holiday and regrettably the chance to have Harry overhear a conversation with Hagrid. He had spent the last three weeks stuck in Geneva with the ICW sorting out a tense situation between the Russians and the Chinese. What made the whole situation worse was he'd run out of lemon sherbets halfway through the crisis and hadn't been able to get more because it had been a closed session. Ah, here was his secret stash. Now to go through the mail that had accumulated, before readying himself for the Longbottom ball. What was this? Eight increasingly urgent messages from Elphias and Dedalus.

Albus hurried over to the floo. "Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent" He said as the flames turned green.

He stepped out. The receptionist ushered him immediately into Elphias' office. "What is this big emergency that you couldn't commit to paper?"

"The Potter wills have been opened, and we're facing a ruinous lawsuit. You have to do something Albus." Elphias said.

"How could that be? I distinctly recall shutting that down before I left. I know you filled nearly twenty injunctions alone."

"The Goblins forced it. They used the treaty and the Minister and the rest of the Wizengamot overruled your seal by a seventy percent margin, to uphold the treaty. The will was read the 20th, and on the 23rd multiple suits were filed against us and when I say us I mean both the firm and you, Albus." Dedalus joined them.

"Who would dare? I mean you said that since the end of August there has been trouble but you never said who was behind it."

"The claimants listed are Petunia Dursley, Lord Harry James Potter, and Gringott's bank, they're being represented by Davies, Corner, And Ogden."

"On what grounds?"

"Their claiming false representation, obstruction of due process, misuse of powers, invasion of privacy, failure to adequately represent and child endangerment. Albus if they win this it will destroy our standing in the wizarding world."

"I see, I guess I'll have to deal with this. I have an ace in the hole though. Go home enjoy the holiday Elphias, and Dedalus."

Albus headed back to Hogwarts, he hoped Minerva didn't throttle him when he told her. Petunia had served her purpose. Harry had stayed safe for the last ten years, but now she was creating a problem. Oh well he'd made it through trickier situations, he'd see a few people at tonight's ball and deal with the rest on the 27th when the Ministry reopened.

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Harry stumbled slightly as he came through the floo at the Longbottoms wearing his green dress robes. Once he was steady he said "Libby." She appeared with his trunk, and the framed portrait of Neville.

Neville was there with his Gran. "Harry it's great you're here. Grandmother may I please introduce Lord Harry James Potter. Harry, my grandmother the Dowager Countess of Longbottom."

"Countess." Harry extended his hand for hers and did the expected. "Thank you for inviting me to be your guest for the holiday. I hope you find this token of my appreciation appropriate." He took the painting from Libby and gave it to her.

Augusta Longbottom had scheduled Lord Potter's arrival so she could spend more than just a few minutes with him. She'd been shocked when Neville got off the train. He had changed more than she thought possible in three months. While still obviously shy he didn't cringe away from everyone as he used to do. He stood a little straighter and moved with a touch more confidence and grace and he had finally shed some of his baby fat. She wished she knew whether it was him just finally coming into his own or if his friendship with Lord Potter was responsible. Looking at the young man in front of her she had her answer. He was fit as if he played quidditch and exuded confidence. She took the gift he offered and removed the tissue paper. Her breath caught, it was Neville as she had always

wished to see him. She had noticed over the last few days the confidence Neville had come home with had seemed to be melting away but she was at a loss to explain why. Hopefully the presence of his friend would bring it back.

"It's a marvelous gift. Who is the painter?" Then she noticed the signature. "You painted this?"

"Yes. I thought perhaps you would wish to see Neville as I have seen him."

"You have a gift."

"Thank you."

"Neville how about you escort Lord Potter and his elf to the guest suite near your room where he is staying. You two may chat and what not, for an hour. At that time I expect you both back dressed for the ball. As Host and Guest of Honor you will need to be here to greet the other guests."

"Yes Gran. Come on Harry."

Augusta looked at the painting a bit longer before the floo chimed signaling the next guests, her sister Enid and Algie.

Harry and Neville spoke of homework and what was expected for the house party. Tonight was the ball. The Longbottoms were expecting a little over eight hundred people, apparently most all the invitations had been accepted. The house party was considerably smaller a mere fifty many of them family or close family allies. Tomorrow morning the guests would be on their own as Neville and his Gran would be visiting his parents at St. Mungo's. Other than tea and dinners most of this week was unstructured. Gift opening would be done privately in everyone rooms the next morning. There were few children at the house party, besides themselves, only Susan Bones and two older boys Roger Davies and Cedric Diggory would be at the party all week. Harry had met Roger at the Corner's party since his dad was one of Harry's solicitors. Harry felt slightly relieved it wasn't going to be all strangers.

Harry asked Neville's advice as to which clothes to choose only to have Neville be astounded by his wardrobe. In the end Harry had to

make his own choices. He chose a base kimono of a green chinese brocade that featured a dragon in silver and a darker green flower then he chose a black on black striped silk hakamas, a black sandwashed silk haori, and as a final touch a kataginu in a dark green satin that matched the darker green in his kimono that had the happiness kanji embroidered on the front lapels in silver and the Potter crest on the back, tied with a narrow silver silk obi.

Harry stood next to Augusta and before Neville in the receiving line and he made good use of the training Petunia had given him in memorizing faces and names. As he was introduced if he knew anything of the person he made an appropriate comment either about their job or the accomplishment they were known for. The first people through the line were the other house guests.

Amos Diggory tried a subtle dig by commenting on Harry's sorting to Slytherin, "I wonder what your father would say you being sorted into Slytherin. I doubt there's been a Potter there before."

"That would be incorrect. The first Baron of Potter was sorted there. As to my father, he probably would be a little disappointed, but my mother told me in a letter it was more important to be a good person than to worry about houses at Hogwarts. It was pleasant meeting you Mr. Diggory, Mrs. Diggory, Cedric."

Corneilus Fudge was one of the first guests coming for just the ball. After eagerly shaking Harry's hand, he tried to take him to task for his mockery of Lucius Malfoy. "You know my boy you really shouldn't say such things."

"I'm sorry Minister but, I wasn't raised in the wizarding world and my comments were based on the information available. My impression was, not that I know much, that the imperious means Mr. Malfoy would do anything Volde-". When the man gasped Harry stopped himself, "I'm sorry. Anything You-Know-Who wanted. As for paying his way out of trouble what other conclusion could I come to when the Daily Prophet's business page from that time shows there were several ministry projects that there was insufficient budget for, that got privately funded that year and Malfoy, oh pardon me, Mr. Malfoy was listed as a major contributor. If I'm incorrect I hope you'll enlighten me as to where my logic is faulty."

Fudge hemmed and hawed a few seconds but then the next guest arrived and he moved from the foyer to the ballroom.

It was twenty minutes before there was a lull in arriving guests and Augusta had a chance to find out the meaning behind the conversation between Harry and the Minister. Once she heard his comment regarding the Malfoys she laughed so hard she cried and had to step to the ladies room for a moment to compose herself. She definitely liked young Lord Potter.

Harry was pleased to see almost all the guests from the Corners' party and they were pleased that he remembered them and greeted them by name.

One of the last to arrive was Albus Dumbledore, he was quite surprised to see Harry at the ball.

"Harry what are you doing here?"

"I am an invited guest, much as you yourself are."

"I thought you were spending the holiday at your aunt and uncle's."

"I spent the first day with my aunt. But I was invited here, and I'd rather not be at Aunt Marge's so I'm spending my holiday where I choose, besides Aunt Petunia said it was fine and she's my guardian not you Headmaster. Have a nice evening."

Augusta was surprised by the very cool tone between the Headmaster and Harry. And she noticed that Harry looked at the Headmaster's Beard, or over his shoulder he refused to meet the man's eyes. Indicating the boy probably knew something of legilimency and occlumency and had no wish to be scanned.

She wondered why the boy distrusted the man so much. Not that she herself had much fondness for the old shyster knowing what she did about him.

Finally the ball was to commence. Harry asked Lady Longbottom what the first dance was going to be.

"A waltz of course."

"May I have this dance?"

Surprised, she said. "I would be honored provided you don't step on my toes."

"My Aunt is a ballerina when I was seven she insisted that I and my cousin learn the waltz. It is the only one I know but she said I learned it well. Part of me dreads the summer I turn fifteen she has threatened a summer of dance lessons."

"I'm surprised. It appears your aunt knows what a young gentlemen needs to learn. Your robes are unusual."

"I'm not terribly fond of traditional robes but these were an acceptable compromise."

"They look good on you, it's rare a wizard or witch out of school announces their school house so boldly when it's Slytherin."

"I didn't take you for someone with house prejudice."

"I'm not. I know there can be more than one reason for a person to be in Slytherin, so what is your ambition Lord Potter?"

"To be my own man. I wanted to ask you Lady Longbottom, I realize this is probably nosy of me to be commenting.."

"Spit it out I won't take offense."

"Neville's wand...it doesn't seem a good match. I only noticed because of the great difficulty I had in getting a wand. I finally had to get a custom wand. Neville works hard at school his theory is as good as he can get it and he does well in the classes not requiring a wand. But in his others, he struggles. I'm sorry if I've offended." Harry said noticing the stiffness in his dance partner.

"Neville uses his father's wand."

"Ah, a way to stay close to him?"

"I'd assumed.." Augusta took a deep breath. She had offered to get Neville a wand but he'd demurred. If what Harry said was correct perhaps she should have insisted. It had just made her happy the

idea of Frank's wand being used, but it wouldn't do if it was hampering Neville's magic. "I thank you for bringing it to my attention, the Longbottoms owe you much."

"You owe me nothing. Neville is my godbrother. I do what I do because we are... family. I must thank you for the invitation. I wasn't looking forward to staying at Hogwarts for the holidays. Neville briefed me on the schedule for the party. I was hoping I could invite myself along when you visit my godmother and I was hoping to take Neville on a brief shopping excursion in muggle London at some point. It's so I can keep a promise."

"I suppose that could be arranged."

The music came to an end. "Thank you for the dance Lady Longbottom."

"You're welcome Lord Potter."

"It's Harry, Ma'am." Harry retreated to the edge of the dance floor as the strains of a minuet started. Harry circulated spending between five and fifteen minutes speaking to various adults. When waltzes were played (about every fifth song) he would ask for whatever woman he was closest to to dance. Be it a much younger girl, an old woman, a girl near his age, or a middle aged woman.

Persus and Tabitha Davies, Horace and Morgana Ogden, and Felicia and Stephen Corner watched with amusement. Tiberius Ogden also watched as he joined his grandnephew and his partners. "That boy understands far more than any child his age should. He's working the room like an experienced political protege."

"He's not stupid that's for sure." Felicia said. "But it's still early all the other children are still here as well."

"Yes, but Roger has already migrated to his school chums." Tabitha said.

"I'm not sure Harry has made many friends at school." Stephen commented.

"Why not? He's a perfectly nice boy." Morgana said.

"From what Michael and Adrianna said, too many people there were disturbed by his sorting, they expected one thing and got another." Stephen said.

"Well it was wrong, that the wizarding world had so many preconceived notions about the boy, and we shall make them see the errors of their ways." Horace grinned wolfishly to his partners.

Harry had just joined Susan Bones and her Great-aunt Amelia, when the opening strains of the supper waltz played. "Susan may I have this dance?" He asked knowing that would make Susan and her Aunt his supper partners.

Blushing she nodded and they took to the floor. After a moment they both started to talk at the same time. Then stopped. Harry acting the gentleman said, "You first."

"You're a very good dancer."

"Only for the waltz I'm afraid. My Aunt insisted I learn it when I was seven. I expect I'll learn more when I'm older though."

"You're also not what I expected."

"What do you mean? I'm not the personification of godlike abilities and heroic perfection the books make me out to be, or I'm not the evil dark lord in training that my sorting is sure to indicate?"

Susan giggled a little. "Both I guess."

"Alas you found me out, I stand before you Harry Potter, normal boy."

She giggled again.

"So how do like school Susan?" That topic carried them through the end of the dance. And Harry cheerfully led Susan and her Great-aunt in to supper where they joined the Corners, the Davies and the Ogdens at a table.

As supper came to an end Amelia Bones came to the conclusion that Harry was very much his parents' child. Outwardly like James including the charm but minus James' more unattractive traits, with

Lily's eyes and intelligence. Of course she admitted to herself after hearing what he said about the Malfoys from Rufus she was predisposed to liking him. She was pleasantly surprised when Harry had listened to the dinner conversation asked pertinent questions, but mostly he just listened and judging by the intensity in his expression learned as much as he could about the Wizengamot and the Ministries workings.

As the dancing resumed Harry resumed his circulation and he ran across Dumbledore and McGonagall discussing something.

"Albus are you sure we should be keeping it in the castle?"

"I promised Nicholas I would keep it safe, plus with the protections you and the others have placed I'm sure it's quite safe. I'll be putting another in place soon as well."

"I still say you should tell Mr. Flammel to find someplace else."

Harry was about to step away before they noticed him, when the strains of a waltz began to play.' Figures I've set a precedent and if I don't follow it it will be noticed'. So he took the remaining five steps to bring him in front of Professor McGonagall, "Professor may I have this dance?"

She eyed him coldly but said, "See you don't step on my toes."

"I've had no complaints so far, ma'am."

They danced quietly for a few minutes before the Professor said, "Have you finished your holiday homework?"

"Yes ma'am. I found Waffling's Magical Theory lacking in insight in the specifics of transfiguration. You have said we must picture the change we wish to make but do you mean we should be picturing the changes down to the cellular level or even down to the atomic level?"

"The essence."

"Right...the essence." Harry decided a change of subject was necessary. "So are you enjoying the ball?"

"It makes for a pleasant change."

"Your robes become you nicely."

"Now you sound like your father trying to turn me up sweet."

"Do I? I don't remember my father at all."

"Mr. Potter I don't know what you're getting at. But I must say I don't approve of the way you encourage Mr. Longbottom to associate with you."

"Mr. Longbottom is my friend and my godbrother. If you have a problem with that I suggest you get over it because you can't change it."

"Yes, well he isn't accepted in my house because of it. It would be different if you were a Gryffindor."

"Yes Professor, I'm sure it would be."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Your house madam, takes after its head."

"How dare you take that tone with me?"

"Quite easily, madam, because I am not the one who walked away from my responsibility and left it on a doorstep. I am what I am, because of choices others have made. You are supposed to set an example as a teacher, and you have, an irresponsible, poor, prejudiced one." Harry was relieved the music came to an end. "Thank you for the dance, Professor." He walked away before the Professor could collect herself enough to answer.

Harry at this point decided he was tired, and he doubted the adults would expect him to stay up.

He went to find Lady Augusta to bid her goodnight. He found Neville first and Neville agreed that they had done their duty as young host and Guest of Honor. When they found her Lady Augusta was speaking with the Corners, the Davies, and the Ogdens. "How fortuitous my hostess and those I call friends altogether in one place.

Lady Longbottom may I congratulate you on a most excellent party. Alas I am but a boy and fear exhaustion will soon claim me so I wish you all, good night." Harry grinned unrepentantly as the other adults laughed at his flowery language.

Lady Longbottom laughed and said, "Sleep well, Neville told me at supper that you wish to join us tomorrow, we'll be leaving at ten."

"In the morning then. Mr. and Mrs. Davies, Mr. And Mrs. Ogden, Elder Ogden, Mr. and Mrs. Corner it is always nice seeing you. Goodnight."

"Goodnight Harry." all the adults answered.

After the boys left. Lady Longbottom spoke. "We were about to discuss something regarding Lord Potter?"

"Yes, as you seem to have taken him under your wing as it were. We were hoping we could approach you. You see there have been several..." Perseus Davies paused not sure how he wanted phrase it.

"Irregularities where the boy is concerned." Stephen Corner continued. "Albus Dumbledore claimed guardianship and placed the boy with his maternal relatives. He blocked the will and told everyone all was well. Harry was raised in ignorance of his place in our society. His maternal aunt wasn't provided with the stipend she should have gotten as Harry's guardian. The fact is she shouldn't have been his guardian at all. Sirius Black followed by Alice Longbottom followed by Minerva McGonagall should have been. Well it's obvious the first two can't, and the third, well. Harry's aunt found Harry on her doorstep Nov. 2nd 1981 and has raised him and prepared him for his station as best she could, personally I think she did an outstanding job all things considered. But now that the wills have been read we think Dumbledore will ask McGonagall to take custody. We wish to block that, but to do that Harry needs a magical guardian."

"Uncle Tiberius, Lady Longbottom we wanted to ask if either of you would consider..."

"Becoming that lad's magical guardian?" Tiberius Ogden rubbed his chin. "You say Albus Dumbledore's been mucking up things, abusing his status as de facto magical guardian?" He paused

looking thoughtful. "Well then it appears to me the lad doesn't need a magical guardian. No that boy needs a trustee board. I think both Lady Longbottom and my self and the six of you."

"Leave me out please Uncle." Morgana pleaded.

"Me as well. " Tabitha added.

He looked at Felicia.

"Count me in that boy is adorable, and I appreciate his cunning qualities as well as his charm."

"So what do you say, Gussie."

"Count me in, if the Chief Warlock is maneuvering that boys life he'll need qualified help with enough clout to make it stick. And you lot are right, most of our kind look the other way if that man is the one behind the shenanigans."

"I'll finish filling out the paperwork tomorrow and owl it. Owl it back as soon as you've signed it, and I'll file first thing the 27th." Stephen Corner said.

Chapter 15 Christmas

Albus knowing that Minerva could be something of a hot tempered Scot, invited her to share Christmas Brunch with him. After serving her a cup of tea the way she liked it he said. "Minerva I came across some news. While I was gone the Goblins persuaded the Wizengamot to override the seal on the Potter wills and apparently you would have been the third choice for Guardian of Harry."

Minerva frowned. Since Mr. Potter had walked away from her last night she had gotten the feeling she should have understood his comments. But he couldn't possibly remember that she had been there the night Albus placed him with the Dursleys so, what had he meant she walked away from her responsibilities and left them on a doorstep. Suddenly the words Albus just said sunk in. "What?"

"I said you were Lily and James' third choice of guardian, and given how Mr. Potter is less than what we expected, I'd like you to file for guardianship."

"Are you saying that Mr. Potter was supposed to be in my care, and rather than tell me you persuaded me to leave him with those people?"

"At the time Minerva, I really truly believed it would be best. Harry would be safest behind blood based wards, and away from the adoration of the wizarding world. He...he needs a firm hand Minerva and someone of your moral fiber to steer him back onto the straight and narrow. Can I count on you? I realize I'm asking a lot from you but I'm afraid of what leaving him where he is will result in. The wizarding world needs him to understand his place and I can think of no one more qualified to teach him that than you. James and Lily had every confidence in you and so do I. Think about it."

"Quiche?"

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In the dungeons Severus Snape stumbled to his cupboard where he stored the hangover remedy. He was thankful none of his snakes had stayed the holiday this year. Usually he had at least six that stayed, to stay out of reach of abusive parents but this year their friends had stepped up and they had gone to spend Christmas in

welcoming climes. Not him, he had only two choices. The school where he had to deal with Albus' cheerful demeanor, or since he had no students this year his childhood home where he had to deal with haunting memories. Not that he was escaping those this Christmas anyway.

He hadn't had a sound night's sleep ever since the day Draco had fired that spell at Harry Potter.

Haunted green eyes looking at him with disdain and distrust, Harry was more than James' son, he was Lily's too. In the moment Harry had looked him in the eyes as he stood following the attack it was like looking into Lily's eyes in the worst moment of his life. Since that second he found himself looking in the mirror and feeling a sense of shame, not the shame of embarrassment he felt when James had pranked him. No it was the deeper shame of knowing he was in the wrong. It was the shame he felt for having told the prophecy to the Dark Lord and getting Lily killed. The shame of knowing he had failed in his promise, knowing he had been so busy believing the hype he had failed to see the truth. Harry wasn't a clone of James Potter if he had been he would have been in Gryffindor.

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Neville was excited to wake up Christmas morning. He quickly cleaned himself up and got dressed then he took the pile of presents at the foot of his bed across the hall to Harry's room because he couldn't wait to see if Harry liked his present.

Harry, for once, was actually sleeping in. He only did it a couple times a year. So he was rather startled by Neville's knock. Libby looked at him, he nodded and scrubbed his hands across his face and through his hair.

Neville came in and realized he had woken Harry. "Sorry."

"S'okay. Just gimme a sec."

"Happy Christmas."

Harry gave him a warm look. "Happy Christmas, Nev. Libby, could you hunt us up some breakfast, please."

She nodded and popped out.

Neville set his pile of gifts on the floor while Harry visited the loo and pulled on a dressing gown. Neville looked around and wondered where Harry's stack of gifts was. "Where's your presents?"

Harry smiled, and reached into his trunk. He pulled out four packages.

Neville looked at the small pile. "Thats it?"

"Yeah, unless you have one to add to it."

"I do. I came back from school and put together my gift for you. I had to go through some boxes of my parents stuff to put it together but I hope you like it."

"Nev, not to be nosy but what happened to your parents?"

"A couple days after the attack on your family when You-Know-Who disappeared, some death eaters paid a call on my parents, they tortured them. With... an Unforgiveable curse.. the cruciatus curse." Neville took a deep breath. "I've never talked about it before. I sorta remember it I remember the screams; and I remember her laugh, LeStrange's I mean. My parents had hidden me in a cupboard. They told me to stay there until I heard Gran. No matter what I heard I was to stay hidden. It had seemed so long but it probably wasn't. They tortured Mum to the point of her being...she doesn't recognize me anymore not really. But the Death eaters found my hidey-hole and were about to drag me into being tortured but Dad stepped in between me and the curse. He'd already been tortured to a state similar to mum's but his instinct was still to protect me... He's worse off than her now." Neville blinked back tears.

Harry leaned over and gave him a hug. "Didn't mean to bring you down. I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I think I feel better for you knowing. Anyway that's about when the aurors showed up. Mum and Dad went to St. Mungo's and have been there ever since. I got checked out then they sent me home to live Gran. The memories aren't super sharp they're just there you know, I don't dwell on it. It usually takes something to bring them to the surface."

Harry's lips quirked into a wry smile. "I know. Sometimes in my dreams I half remember too. So shall we open presents?"

Libby popped in with a breakfast tray that she put on the sideboard. The boys opened their presents. Hermione had gotten both of them boxes holding eight Chocolate frogs. Harry asked, "What did you get her?"

"Gift certificate for Flourish and Blott's. You?"

"Helga's Guide Of Do's and Don'ts for Young Witches and Wizards."

"You didn't."

"Yes, I did. Come on even you have to admit her manners by wizarding standards are frightful. I mean can you picture her here?"

Neville shuddered. "Gran invited her because I've mentioned her. I was never so relieved as when she told me she was sorry she couldn't come because her parents were taking her to Switzerland to skif?.. skill?"

"Try ski. Open mine."

"Lilywhites gift certificate. Harry you shouldn't have."

"I got permission from your Gran to take you too. I hope you have some muggle clothes."

"Yeah, Cousin Callidora usually gives me some every year."

"Here's mine to you."

"Mind if I save it till I'm done with the ones from my family?"

"No cause it will take a while, and I'd like to go through it with you."

Harry dove into his stack while Nev dug into his. Aunt Petunia had gotten him some books for him to self study Latin. Dudley had gotten him a book on Heraldry so he'd be able to figure out the meaning of his coat of arms. He snickered when he opened Vernon's . In it was sketch paper and charcoal for sketching. It was

probably as inexpensive and as close to a comment as Vernon dared make.

Neville looked at Harry. "What's funny?"

"My uncle's gift. Muggles have stories where Father Christmas leaves naughty children coal in their stockings and," He held up the charcoal smiling. "My uncle gave me coal. Paper too. It just struck me funny."

"Okay." Neville said not really understanding.

"My stomach thinks my throat's been cut. I'm going to grab plates for us. You keep working on that pile." Harry went to the sideboard to see what Libby had brought. Eggs benedict, grilled tomatoes and mushrooms, caramel nut rolls, kippers, baked apples, poached pears, porridge, a blueberry and cream cheese flaky pastry and tea; Harry started dishing up. A knock sounded.

With a nod from Harry, Libby opened the door it was Lady Longbottom. "Is Neville in here?"

"Yes, would you like to join us? I was just about to dish up some breakfast."

"Thank you. Harry. I would like that very much. By the way thank you for the chocolates."

Harry had found out from Neville how many guests were going to be at the house party and had gotten ten piece box chocolates one for each guest and one for his hostess for Christmas rather than be thought to have poor manners. But apparently none of the other house guests did the same. "You're welcome Lady Longbottom."

"I think you should Call me Lady Augusta. Especially since I have been approached about being on a trustee board for you." At Harry's confused look she chuckled. "Magical children all have a magical guardian. Muggleborn children it's usually their Head of House at Hogwarts. Your solicitors have decided you will have a trustee board instead of Minerva McGonagall or Severus Snape; myself, Tiberius Ogden, Felicia and Stephen Corner, Horace Ogden and Perseus Davies."

Harry's face which had tensed relaxed slightly. "Thank you Lady Augusta." Harry noticed Libby had popped out and back with dishes for Lady Augusta. So he showed her to the side board. Harry finished dishing up and then carried his plate and tea cup to where he could watch Neville as he ate.

Neville worked his way through the stack of twelve gifts. The last he opened was the one from Cousins Callidora, Harfang, and their children. "See, Harry, muggle clothes!"

Harry looked and winced. To his mind, striped polyester pants, lime green polyester shirt, and a loose white leather vest did not equate clothes; rejects from the disco era maybe, but not clothes.

Augusta and Neville both noticed. "What?"

"Those might have been in style when our parents were kids, nowadays people wouldn't be caught dead in something like that."

"Oh." Neville looked very downhearted.

"Cheer up Neville, We are wizards after all I'm sure Lady Augusta can transfigure them into something presentable."

Neville looked to his Gran. She nodded, "If Harry shows me an appropriate example I'm sure I can manage."

Harry put his finished breakfast dishes back on the sideboard. Libby handed him a washcloth and he cleaned his hands. Then he moved to the present from Neville. It wasn't a large box but Harry unwrapped it carefully then he opened it. Inside was a photo album. He opened it. The first photo was of two women both holding babies. One was his mother, he assumed the other was Neville's.

"Our first meeting I think." Neville said, Harry turned the page. "I sorted through mum and dad's photos of their Hogwarts years and found a fair number of photos with your mum and a few with your dad. I duplicated them and this is the result."

Harry flipped through the pages and saw pictures of his Mum and Alice Longbottom throughout their Hogwarts careers. He was a little surprised to see Severus Snape next to his mum in several of the early photos, trying to hide bashfully behind her. The photos of his

young father seemed to center around quidditch. Harry flipped the page.

"Now these photos were in an envelope marked Marauder Blackmail. I opened it because of the map you know."

Harry laughed as he saw a photo of his mum hexing his dad with what looked like bats made out of his own boogies. There was one of a boy with light brown hair so intent on his studies he didn't notice as Harry's dad changed his robes into a pink frilly dress. There was one of a dark haired boy intent on his cauldron that caught his shocked expression as it exploded in his face leaving a sooty residue. Then there was one of a pudgy, rather rat-faced boy stuck to a wall. There were several more photos featuring the four boys, all of them caught in a potentially embarrassing moments.

"I remember Frank telling me about these." Lady Augusta laughed. "Your father and his friends, Harry, were notorious pranksters. Frank got caught in several of their pranks. Finally Frank caught them in several embarrassing moments and then blackmailed them into leaving him off their target list."

Harry ran his fingers over the photos, and wondered who was who of the other boys. Then he turned the page. There were two wedding photos one of Neville's parents where Harry's mum and dad apparently stood up with Frank and Alice. The other was of Harry Parents wedding where Alice stood up with Lily.

Augusta, reading Harry's expression, said, "Yes Harry, your father was Frank's best man despite the difference in their ages, they were on the quidditch team together. They got on in the same year, Frank's fourth your fathers second. Frank's best friend from his year died in a Death Eater attack a month before the wedding and your father stepped up and filled in. They were aurors together along with him." Augusta's voice dripped with disgust on the last word and she poked at the man in best man position in the wedding photo of Harry's parents.

Harry closed the album. "Neville, this is one of best presents I've ever gotten, thank you."

Neville grinned broadly at him.

"Neville as you are ready, and Harry is still in his bedclothes I can only assume you woke him. Not the behavior called for from a host."

Harry saw his friend flush with shame at the rebuke. "Lady Augusta it's alright, I usually rise early. Neville knows that, and he had no way of knowing that I was having a bit of a lie-in. I only do it a couple times a year. I don't mind." He gave Neville a reassuring look. "I would like to clean up and get ready. Give me ten minutes and I'll be ready to go." He glanced at the mantle clock. "You did say ten, right?" It was fifteen until ten. Both Longbottoms nodded and left.

Ten minutes later Harry met them near the main floo. Harry having learned from Neville that while all the fireplaces in the house could be used for calls only the main one off the entry hall could be used to enter or exit Longbottom Abbey. Augusta gave his fine midnight blue and black houndstooth wool robe an interested glance. Harry grinned because under his cassock style robe he wore trousers, a shirt and a light jumper. She lead the way to the floo and in a short time the three were at St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries.

Harry hadn't been to the hospital before. Medi-wizard Shingleton had offices above one of the stores in Diagon Alley.

Augusta Longbottom lead the way to the fourth floor's Janus Thickey ward.

Harry didn't know what to expect but all he could think as he quietly watched Neville with his parents was there were worse things than death. He offered Alice a small box of chocolates and he and Neville both enjoyed the expression of bliss that crossed Alice's face as the candy slowly melted in her mouth. Lady Augusta spoke with the healers then spent a short while combing Frank's sparse hair and trimming his fingernails. As they were leaving Alice gave Neville something which he tucked in his pocket after thanking her with a smile.

The rest of Christmas day and Boxing day were fairly quiet. At Neville's urging Harry spent more of his time with the younger set than with the adults. He impressed both Roger Davies and Cedric Diggory with his chess playing skills and Susan Bones enjoyed that he was willing to talk to her instead of playing exploding snap with the other boys.

All three were somewhat chagrined to realize that for a whole term they had bought into the hysterical reaction that Harry's sorting had caused, and vowed on their return to school they would try to dispel the rumors. Harry was normal, not some super evil person.

On the twenty seventh Harry led an excursion to Muggle London. He helped the adults Amelia Bones, Augusta Longbottom, Cecilia Diggory, Tabitha Davies and a few of the other houseguests make changes to the magicals' muggle clothing so they would completely blend in. Then after flooing to The Leaky Cauldron he lead them to the Liecester Underground station and got tickets so they could travel to Picadilly Circus, they did a three hour tour of the Royal Academy of Art then went to Lillywhites where Neville, Cedric and Roger and Susan got trainers and some muggle exercise clothes. Harry carefully kept an eye on the group to keep them from making any faux pas due to magical misunderstanding. He was surprised that Roger and Cedric were interested in the way non magicals trained their bodies, and even more surprised when they asked him questions about what he did. After that the adults side along apparated them back to Diagon Alley. Where Neville and his Gran were making a trip to Ollivander's, while everyone else visited other stores.

Neville dragged Harry with him. "But Gran, wands are expensive and Dad's..."

"No, Neville, I have quite made up my mind. Harry has informed me your father's wand doesn't always respond well. You aren't as strong as your father and to work with a uncooperative wand will hamper your weak-"

Harry had watched as Neville quailed under his Grandmother's words. "STOP!" He snarled at her with an impressive amount of venom. "Cripes! Don't you ever think about what you sound like, what your words and actions say to your grandson. You know what half of Neville's problem is? You! Tearing him down instead of building him up. Criticizing him instead of encouraging him."

Lady Augusta was completely taken aback."How Dare You!"

Harry inwardly winced, but he wasn't going to back down this was too important. "The more important question Lady Longbottom is

how dare you? You were entrusted with raising your grandson. He loves you, but you spend over half your time telling him he's weak and incompetent, and putting down his choices. Neville is tenth in our class and that's with a wonky wand does that sound like an incompetent to you? Perhaps if you spent as much time encouraging him as you do criticizing him he would have the confidence to be even higher than that. Perhaps instead of making mistakes because he doubts himself he would trust himself enough to excel. Neville knocked out a troll at eleven to save a friend. Instead of always going off about your heroic son you should be looking at your heroic grandson and seeing him for what he really is: his father's son. Come on Neville."

Neville was standing there jaw dropped as Harry laid into his Grandmother. Normally he would have been all for stopping Harry, but Harry was verbalizing every resentful, angry thought he had ever had and he found himself wanting to cheer Harry on instead. When Harry tugged his arm toward Ollivander's, he followed and the two boys entered the shop leaving Lady Longbottom outside.

"Mr. Potter, Mr. Longbottom what brings you here on such a glorious day." Mr. Ollivander said.

"Um...I need a wand you see I've been using my father's..."

"Ah, yes, Hornbeam and unicorn hair, a fine wand. But while it chose him, it did not choose you so let's see which wand does."

Twenty minutes later Neville was cradling a cherry and unicorn wand, it turned out the unicorn mare that donated the hair for Frank's wand had also supplied the hair for Neville's. Neville used his Christmas money to pay for the five galleon wand. Harry encouraged him to get a holster and a wand care kit as well.

As they were about to leave the shop Harry looked at Neville, "Neville, will your Grandmother forgive me?"

"Harry, I love my Gran. I respect her for taking me in and raising me, but you were right. I spend way more time worrying about disappointing her than... Ever since we met you've encouraged rather than criticized. It wasn't until you said what you did about me being a hero and my father's son... Maybe it's having my own wand, maybe it's just having someone beside me who has no doubts.

When I first came back from school I felt really confident between where I was with my grades, the fact you've helped me get stronger physically..But back with Gran it was the comparisons, the put-downs, the doubts and I kinda stopped believing again . I started to believe her again, I won't do that again. As for what you said to Gran, my advice apologize for how you said it, but not for what you said. Does that make sense? Gran likes people who stand up for what they believe in...maybe it's time I did a little of that myself."

Chapter 16 Questions, Answers and More Questions

The rest of the Holidays were rather awkward. Lady Augusta didn't send him away but she ignored Harry despite his apology, and it was with relief that Harry returned to the London apartment. Harry spent the next few days either reading for the next term, reading family journals, talking to the family portraits, reading the books he had gotten for Christmas or just goofing off. He did make one foray into London for more art supplies, and one trip to the solicitor's office to ask a few questions.

"How'd the custody filing go, Mr. Corner?"

"It's being challenged by Minerva McGonagall, probably at Dumbledore's behest nothing unexpected."

"So how will that get settled?"

"Both sides will present evidence as to why it should be settled in their direction, and the court will decide. We have substantial evidence that she wouldn't be.. right for your guardian anymore. Plus we have a very solid alternative I doubt there will be a problem."

"That's good what did you find out about all the people listed in the wills?"

"Edgar Bones and most his family were killed a month before your parents. Your mother's solicitor disappeared a few days before the attack on you and your parents, since there was a dark mark over his home everyone assumes he's dead. Frank and Alice were barely out of hiding when they were attacked a week after the attack on your family and-"

"They've been in St. Mungo's ever since. What about my dad's friends?"

"Petter Pettigrew died, along with twelve muggles when Sirius Black caused an explosion on November 2, 1981. Sirius Black has resided in Azkaban Prison since that day."

"I'd like to see the trial transcripts. I want to know what my godfather did exactly. What about Remus Lupin?"

"Lupin is a bit dodgy, for some reason he's proving very elusive to track down. I know he writes articles for Dark Arts Defense Today from time to time but I haven't had any luck finding him yet. As for the ministry witnesses to the wills. Croaker still works for the unspeakables but both he and Delores Umbridge work for the ministry. They aren't going to insist that a Wizengamot seal be overridden."

"How did Dumbledore get control?"

"From what we can tell happenstance. But we definitely have grounds for a major suit against both him and the firm of Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent. They were not even who did the wills; it was Kyle Larsten."

" Good. One last question, in both Dumbledore's letter to my aunt and my mum's letter to me, they say I'm a child of prophecy. What does that mean?"

"Apparently a prophecy was given about you."

"How can I find out that prophecy?"

"I don't know but I can find out."

"Sounds good. Thank you Mr. Corner."

"You're welcome Harry, now scoot."

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On the Hogwarts Express, Neville and Harry got a compartment together and Neville watched for Hermione. When she joined them her first words to Harry were "I'm not speaking to you."

Harry found this highly amusing and said, "But you just did." but Hermione refused to be baited into further conversation. Needless to say their compartment was probably the quietest on the train.

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A week into the new year Draco proved once again how much he had in common with the Gryffindors. He attempted to provoke Harry one night in the Slytherin common room.

"So Potter I hear your relatives hate you so much you had to go to the Longbottom Party with a house elf escort."

"Well at least I got invited."

"You stupid halfblood!"

"Halfblood and proud of it. As my "mudblood" mother would say the proof is in the magic. Where's yours Draco? Oh yeah, that's right. You can't cast spells unless you have a teacher right there next to you for the next two years, all because you can't keep your head. That's funny I thought hotheadedness was a Gryffindor trait. Don't worry, I won't keep my promise to teach you a lesson. It would hardly be cricket, as all you know is magic. I have so many more things in my arsenal, to paraphrase William Shakespeare I refuse to have a battle of wits with an unarmed person."

Any power Draco hoped to wield in Slytherin was broken that night.

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School had resumed and it wasn't long before the pranks on Harry resumed. Harry though was tired of being a target and decided some payback was in order. So he spent his spare time doing research and came up with two very diabolical plans one for the Weasley twins and one for the whole school. Now the only question was how to carry them out. Harry also did a little research into what Dumbledore was up to and didn't care for the conclusions he drew.

Hermione remained adamant that she wasn't speaking to him. But she still met with Harry, Neville, Tracy and Daphne in the library. Harry was moderately surprised when Susan Bones her best friend Hannah Abbot and Michael Corner started joining them as well. Harry found it hysterical when Hermione would make a remark that was clearly aimed at him but she always claimed it was to the group. It was a week later when Daphne sick of this behavior finally did something.

"Granger, what the hell is your problem?"

"I don't have one." Hermione said sullenly.

"Bullshit."

"Fine. Harry gave me a book about etiquette for Christmas alright. I have manners how dare he imply I don't."

Daphne choked, then sputtered, then finally burst out laughing. Madame Pince glared at her. "Harry, gave you a book on wizarding etiquette? Good for him!"

"Daphne I though we were sort of friends, how can you find this funny?"

"First off Hermione, I'm not your friend. I tolerate you mostly because for whatever odd reason Harry seems to sort of like you, and you are an excellent study partner. You are, however a social disaster. You say you have manners; well, maybe you have muggle manners but there's nothing mannerly about how you like to rub your thoughts, beliefs, and traditions in the rest of our faces. The reason why muggleborns are frequently despised, is they never bother to learn the magicals' side, they just see some aspects of our society they don't like and promptly try to change things to make them more like the muggle world. We are not muggles. Harry was being nice. He was trying to give you information so you wouldn't be perceived as badly by the rest of us. And you've repaid him by being a bitch."

Hermione's jaw dropped.

"Read the bloody book before you finish committing social suicide."

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As per his promise when the spring recess happened Dumbledore took Harry to the cottage in Godric's Hollow. Albus was dismayed to see that the cottage had collapsed further in the ten years and five months since he'd been there last. He cast several spells to lift fallen walls out of the way and to reinforce the floors, remaining walls, and ceilings so they could be safe.

In the kitchen/dining room they found a smashed table and chairs but the china cabinet and hutch along with its contents were intact. The study/library had a few books that were intact but most had been irreversibly damaged by water that had blown in, and led to rot. The biggest loss in Harry's mind wasn't the books however but instead the portrait of his grandparents. It had gotten damaged not due to a wall collapse in the attack, but rather one that collapsed due to weather damage in the last few years. The living room had broken furniture and Harry suspected this was where his father and Voldemort had fought because of many broken items and scorched marks. Upstairs Harry searched the nursery where he had slept and played as baby, but it too was a total loss. In his parents room the damage was extensive but he found a few things that made the trip worthwhile: his mother's jewelry box and some journals in an enclosed cabinet that were intact.

Albus felt heartsick he clearly should have done this years ago if he had perhaps Harry would have had a semblance of his grandparents. But he had always been so busy.

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In the library after doing his homework, Harry took out a sheet of Parchment. He'd spent quite a few hours on the weekends putting the puzzle together and used his dad's cloak for observation only to come to a very disturbing conclusion. Now all he needed was to act.

April 10, 1992

Dear Mr. Flammel,

You and I have never met, however I feel you should be apprised of what Albus Dumbledore is doing with your stone. I'm not sure exactly what all is guarding it but I suspect it was designed to test the mettle of a first year student. I believe there are several barriers from several disciplines, but should the stone Dumbledore has be genuine I believe he might have miscalculated. I heard Hagrid the gamekeeper reporting to Dumbledore that he found a unicorn that was dead its blood had been drunk. It was just the one but since unicorn blood is a source of life, I fear something has come to the school after the stone. If it cannot be kept safe I suggest you destroy it. While owning it may not have corrupted you and your wife. I fear

for the rest of us mortals.

Sincerely, Harry James Potter

That night as he took Hedwig from the dorms he said, "This is likely to be hard, Hedwig but this needs to go to Nicholas Flammel."

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Cassandra Yaxley sighed. As a seventh year she had research projects for all her classes to complete. NEWTS were two thirds test one third project. Her projects for all her classes except muggle studies were going well but her muggle studies project kept eluding her. She flung herself into chair at the table her cousin was sitting at.

Marcus could immediately tell something was wrong. "What?"

"Bloody muggle studies project is going nowhere. I cannot find one single solitary book that can explain to me how a battery works."

Marcus glanced over at the first years at the next table. Potter was corking his ink. And closing his books. "Potter, come here."

"Yes, you called." He said a certain amount of disdain in his voice. Only the verdant warmth in his eyes gave lie to the tone.

Marcus wanted to laugh because Harry understood the fictions that ruled Slytherin. Marcus' family was dark therefore there had to be coldness between them but in reality he was quite fond of the youngest snake. "You grew up with muggles, explain to my cousin how a battery works."

Harry's eyes brightened with interest and he joined them. Ten minutes later Harry was drawing and animatedly talking with Sandra.

Two days later Hedwig appeared at breakfast with the rest of the owls. Harry fed her some bacon while he eagerly untied the parchment attached to her leg.

Dear Mr. Potter,

I was very much surprised to receive your letter. We have rather thick mail wards, yet your owl found her way past them. She is both unusual and impressive. As to the item of concern in your letter, you don't live as long as I have without getting the measure of people. I would urge you to ignore a certain someone's setup as his bait at the end is counterfeit. Something created long ago to keep the corruptible focused one place while the true prize is quite safe elsewhere. Thank you for your concern.

Sincerely, N.F.

"Get some rest today Hedwig. You did good getting that last one to Flammel. I have a letter for Aunt Petunia to go tonight. You can take a couple days on returning with that one. Take some time to hunt." Harry stroked his owl's feathers before offering her another piece of bacon. He then headed off to class.

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Harry found Cassandra Yaxley interesting, she was astoundingly smart and curious as all get out. She was by her own confession practically a squib. It had only been her mother requesting a few favors from the board of governors and an custom wand that had gotten her into Hogwarts. She had commented that Neville's comment better dead than a squib wasn't far from the truth. Her mother not wanting the shame of having a squib daughter had taken her to Mr. Marchello to get a wand sensitive enough that Cassandra could use it at all. Cassandra allowed she would have rather gone to a muggle boarding school and preparing for a life she could actually excel at instead of coming to Hogwarts and barely passing. She and Harry had long discussions about muggle life and it wasn't long before he recruited her to help him find spells and potions he could use to get his payback on the Weasley twins, and on the whole school at the end of the year.

Cassandra despite being a Ravenclaw, was Slytherin enough to appreciate his ideas and had been on the receiving end of enough harassment that the not so nice nature of Harry's ideas didn't phase her. What she found the most interesting was that Harry was willing to tell her anything she asked about, in the muggle world.

The fifth week of spring term Harry got a large package from Aunt Petunia. He was rather surprised to get all of the things he'd asked

for at once given Aunt Petunia couldn't exactly cast a lightening spell. Hedwig had shown many unusual qualities such as her ability to get into places that theoretically she shouldn't be able to get to, and unusual speed going to and getting back from her destinations, but this took the cake. The box held books and not just one or two, no the box held a dozen books and Hedwig carried it like it was a box of feathers. Magicals didn't notice they just assumed the box had been spelled but Harry knew better. He'd better do some research.

The letter accompanying the books was brief.

Harry,

In the box is the books you said you wanted me to get: The Way Things Work, and the GCSE study guides. I got all of the subjects except languages. If you want, when you're older, I can help you arrange to do testing during the summers. I'm proud that you wish to be qualified as a normal person too, but I don't want for that desire to interfere with our goals. Your position in the Wizarding world demands that, that be your highest priority.

If you need anything else let me know.

Yours, Petunia Dursley

Harry shared the books with Cassandra and she voiced the opinion, "Why can't NEWT level Muggle Studies use these sort of books." She was holding The Way Things Work at the time.

Harry just grinned back. "My mum said that muggles studies wasn't worth the time. That I'd be better off getting with a muggleborn and experiencing it for myself. Course she thought I'd be growing up magical not muggle."

"Yeah, well my family ..."

"Yeah, Aaron kinda told me."

"If my father were here, he'd be flipping out over my even talking to you."

"How do you feel about it?"

"That whole better dead than a squib line, your lion friend said. I stand on that line. It's just because I'm a daughter, my mum's only daughter that I'm here rather than dead in an accident. I'm just scared..."

"About what?"

"Don't worry about it Harry, it isn't something someone your age should have to worry about. Thanks for the book I should be able to finish my project now. I appreciate the help."

"No problem, Cassandra. Cassandra if I can help with other stuff or if you want someone to talk to I'll listen. I know I'm only a kid and my family was on the opposite side from yours the last war, but that was our parents not us alright. I'll help you if I can."

"Gee Harry that's really sweet, almost Hufflepuffish of you."

Harry made a grossed out face. "I know, disgusting isn't it? Don't tell. I don't want to damage my reputation."

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As Harry went through his school days he didn't notice how often he was under watchful eyes.

The twinkly, blue eyes behind half moon spectacles watched him the most and had the inhabitants in the castle doing the same. In his opinion Harry was a disappointment in several ways, the boy was first of all a Slytherin. Second, the boy seemed to have no curiosity at all. Third, the boy had made friends with others in his house. Briefly he'd held hope when the boy's only two friends had been Lions but now over two thirds of the people he associated with were snakes. To be fair most were not from dark families but the portraits reported that Harry had frequent interaction with Marcus Flint and now he was interacting not just with Aaron Yaxley but also Cassandra Yaxley. Recently Millicent Bullstrode, Blaise Zabini and even Vincent Crabbe had taken to coming to the library study sessions. This wasn't good at all. Fourth there was all the legal wrangling that was going on in London that Harry had started.

Albus was quite put out that back in December, Rebecca Smythewick of Wizarding Child Services, the smallest department of

the ministry had looked through the custody paperwork he'd gotten Minerva to fill out, and had simply looked up to him with her cloudy blue gray eyes and said. "I'm sorry this petition cannot be granted on grounds of prior desertion of the child. Lord Harry James Potter has an adequate guardianship contract filed two hours ago by his muggle physical guardian and a magical trustee board. If she wishes Professor McGonagall could file a challenge, but it would be an uphill battle for her to claim custody due to the stated grounds for the Guardianship contract that was filed earlier." He'd had to get additional paperwork filed so Minerva could challenge the initial decision.

It was horribly bothersome. His solution to the legal suits problem was no longer going to work, which left him in a vulnerable position.

Another pair of eyes that watched the boy had an obsidian hue. They observed that contrary to his previous belief the boy tended to treat everyone with a modicum of respect and actually got along with most everyone. Furthermore the boy was quite intelligent, he boy gave Minerva's lion, Miss Granger a run for her money without being insufferable about it. His essays were concise and thorough without the extra length trying to impress others with his knowledge. Now that his eyes were opened, he gave the boy the outstandings he earned. Of course, he docked Granger for her verbosity.

He was surprised that his sixth year prefect and the young boy had such a close relationship until he realized that Marcus had stepped in and fulfilled the role of mentor that he usually played for his snakes. But what really astounded him was the boy and the prefect played it like they were adversaries bowing to the political realities. It was only his years as a spy that allowed him to recognize it for what it was. It left him feeling ashamed and angry with himself because his observations had also shown him the boy wasn't quick to trust and was Slytherin enough to know when to be transparent and when to be opaque. He could have influenced the boy. A boy who showed amazing promise, a boy of prophecy. But no he'd been an idiot, willfully blind, and on the rare occasions he was honest with himself, he had become his own worst nightmare.

A pair of hazel eyes behind square framed glasses watched the boy when her schedule allowed, frequently doing so from slitted pupils. She watched him with a mixture of fear and regret. Fear of what he might one day become and regret because he so resembled his

parents. Fear that she would never be forgiven and regret because there was no way to make up for her failure. In the course of her watching she saw Neville Longbottom's devotion to him and the way it was returned. She saw that he was pranked frequently but that he would neutralize it and go on. He showed a Hufflepuff's work ethic and a Ravenclaw like intellect. She was uncertain if she should do as Albus said or if she should leave things well enough alone. The last thing she wanted was the young man she watched angry with her. Sometimes in class she saw such looks of disdain and distrust in his eyes when their eyes met across the classroom. It shouldn't bother her as much as it did given the boy in question was a Slytherin, but somehow those eyes looking out of that face...it was just so hard.

Six sets of tennis ball shaped eyes watched somewhat mournfully as their dearly loved master went through his days and never acknowledged them. They supposed it was their just due for doing what the old one said. Coming to Hogwarts instead of waiting for their master to return. They did their best to serve him. Keeping his room clean and always doing his laundry as soon as he put it in his hamper. When he came to the kitchen they always served him, and they wanted more than anything for him to formalize his bond to them. They wanted their ache to ease.

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Neville looked around Gryffindor Tower. He'd been looking for Hermione. She hadn't been to their evening study session. He really wished he had Harry's map but it was Flint's patrol night, and while Snape no longer had Harry in detention every weekend, he still had him in quasi house arrest. Finally he found her in an unused classroom not far from the tower. "Here you are!" then Neville noticed the red eyes and tear tracks. "What's wrong?"

"Neville are you my friend? Or am I just a convenient source of homework help?"

"I'm your friend. What's going on?"

"Last night Daphne got mad at me for the way I treated Harry. She told me not to show up again, that I was smart enough or stupid enough to go it alone. My contribution didn't outweigh my attitude. If I couldn't be mature enough to make peace I didn't deserve to be

there." She sniffed long and hard. "Harry will never forgive me, not after all I've done. He tried to warn me. He got me an etiquette book for Christmas and I only just finished it."

"When did you start it Hermione?"

"Last night. Daphne was right I'm a bitch. Ever since... Harry has warned me that teachers are human make mistakes, that I shouldn't put people on pedestals. That books aren't the end all and be all. I thought I knew so much, but then after what Daphne said months ago. I got angry and put it off for three months, now I know I was cutting my nose off to spite my face. I read the etiquette book and now I realize how bad a friend I am. I resent it every time he scores higher than me. I put the words of adults ahead of things he tells me. I mean it wasn't Professor McGonagall or Professor Dumbledore that rescued me in that bathroom back on Halloween it was Harry and you. Did Harry even get any points for coming and saving me? All I know was that Professor Snape did the whole make Harry make friends in his house thing. I know the Headmaster favors Gryffindor but he's supposed to be Headmaster and show no favoritism but I look at how Tracey and Daphne get treated versus how Susan and Hannah get treated and it's not fair. And I look at the Weasley twins and how they treat Harry. But then when he didn't react to their pranks and started to circumvent them, it became this challenge to provoke him. I think at first it was the whole everyone expected him to be one thing but he was like completely different and it was like they were all mad at him. What right had they to expect anything? Harry is just a kid and no one really knows him. It seems like they expect him to be this superhero. And then since the sorting they act like they expect him to be super evil because he got sorted into Slytherin. Haven't they ever heard of self-fulfilling prophecies? And I don't know, I'm just so mixed up and it's just so unfair. And then I've been so terrible to him and... and if I were him I'd tell me to drop dead or something else like that but what does Harry do he smiles and ignores my bitchiness. He just takes all the crap everyone piles on him and... and.." Hermione broke into heavy sobs. "I'm a terrible person!"

Neville was uncomfortable with hysterical people let alone hysterical sobbing girls. But since Mione was his friend, he'd suck it up. "Come on I think you could use a calming draught then we'll talk about this and come up with some ways you can be a better friend."

Chapter 17 The Forbidden Forrest

School continued Harry studied hard and was careful to keep to himself for the most part. He still enjoyed the talks with Cassandra Yaxley especially when she got him the spells he needed for his prank on the Weasley twins. But although he was a friend to several people he didn't allow himself to be emotionally close to anyone except Neville.

Neville and he ran together three times a week and worked out using tai chi and karate three other times a week. Harry was surprised when one day Neville didn't show up. That was until he got to breakfast and heard that Neville was in the headmaster's office. Rumors about what had happened in Gryffindor Tower that morning flew around the school faster than the flock of school owls. Apparently the two fourth years, a fifth year, and a second year that had the biggest problem with Neville, decided his going to workout with Harry wasn't to be tolerated any longer, despite what happened after the time they threw Neville down the stairs. Neville had put to good use the defense Harry had taught him and kicked their arses.

Augusta Longbottom wasn't sure who she was more mad at, the Headmaster of Hogwarts or his deputy. She was thrilled with her grandson. Neville had lived up to the family tradition. He had stood firm in the face of opposition, he had stuck up for those he called friend against everyone. "So can you explain to me Dumbledore why Neville is being brought here to this office if all he did was defend himself against four older and bigger students."

"He put them in the infirmary Augusta." Minerva said.

"I should hope so! Teach those fools that they can't get away with behavior like that. Maybe if more people had to live with the pain of their mistakes they would make fewer of them."

"Lady Longbottom surely you understand we can't allow..."

"My grandson to defend himself?"

"If he sinks to this level now, think what level he'll be at in seven years? I fear I need you to reason with him to see that his friendship with Harry Potter is going to lead him down a dark path."

"I see, so that is what this is really about. Harry Potter and the fact your reins on him have been cut. Neville defended himself against four older and more knowledgeable students using whatever skills Harry has trained into him. Yes, I know about their friendship and the time they spend exercising together. I saw them working together on it during my house party. So far as I am concerned your fear that Neville will go dark is horse hockey. He is becoming strong and a survivor, I think there's more to fear of those other children growing dark unless they learn there are consequences to actions."

"I pity you Minerva, you are so blind to reality. Albus, I wish to speak to my grandson now."

Neville was lead into the office by his Head of House. "Gran! I'm.."

"Mr. Longbottom are you aware of why you are here?" Dumbledore said.

Neville grimaced. "Because I put Cormac and Cameron MacLaggen, Cecil Wilder and Miles Creston in the infirmary."

"Yes, exactly-"

"Are you saying I should have let them hurt me again, instead?"

"Again? What do mean again? Neville?" his grandmother asked.

"About a month into school, Cameron, Cecil, and Miles tossed me down the stairs to the dungeons. I broke my arm, got a bad sprain of my ankle, and had a concussion. Harry started teaching me defense after that. I had asked him to help me get fitter, after he saved me in flying class. But after they hurt me, Harry said if the teachers wouldn't do more than assign detention to people who did what those boys did, I needed to learn defense. Cause if I didn't stand up for me, I couldn't expect others to do it for me." Neville mumbled the last sentence.

Augusta suddenly saw the truth of Lord Potter's words to her after Christmas. She had failed her grandson in that rather than encouraging him to stand up and be counted she had allowed others to put him down, indeed she had put him down herself, and then she wondered she was why Neville had been shy and easily bullied. "Is

this true? Did those boys hurt my grandson and all you did was put them in detention?"

The faces of both Minerva and Albus told the truth of the tale.

"SO the real issue here isn't that those boys were hurt, the real issue is that Neville proved himself able to defend himself through using unconventional means, means you disapprove of." She gave them a disgusted look. "Fine my judgement is this. Neville, you will serve a detention or as many as those boys individually served for their attack on you, but no more. You are not to use these skills of yours in anything but self defense and hopefully your housemates now understand there are consequences to attacking you."

Neville met his Gran's eyes. After a moment he nodded. "Yes Ma'am."

"As for you two, I have never been more disgusted in my life. Your job is a, to protect the students and b, educate them. You are obviously failing at the first and the lessons you're teaching aren't ones that benefit the magical world. If I were on the board of governors you would both be out the door, fortunate for you both I am not. Although perhaps I should see if I can change that.

"Now, I want a word with my grandson alone if you please. As long as I am here, I'd like a word with Lord Potter. As a member of his trustee board, I have that right."

Albus frowned heavily. "I'll send for him. Minerva will you show Lady Longbottom to one of the visitor salons please. Then send for Mr. Potter. Perhaps the three of them could have lunch together."

"Yes sir, shall I also inform the elves?"

"That would be appreciated, Minerva." The three left the Headmaster's office.

Minerva left Neville and his Gran in a salon not far from the Great Hall. The first salon had a portrait on the wall Augusta gave Minerva a look. "Minerva, do you truly believe me that stupid? I want privacy and no paintings."

McGonagall blushed and led them to another salon further down the hall. Once she left to go fetch Harry, Augusta put up privacy wards then looked Neville in the eyes. "I am proud of you, Neville. I think you've earned the right to wear this." She held out a ring to him.

Neville took it. Examining it he exclaimed, "The heir's ring?"

"Yes, you've shown me you're ready. Despite my doubt's and my mistakes I believe you have what it takes to become the next earl. The ring will allow you to start studying the family magics this next summer."

Neville looked at the ring in his hand. He had thought he would never wear the heir's ring. The Longbottom Earl was always magical. He had to be, he also had to uphold the family ideals of honor and bravery. Neville had never believed himself magical enough. The Longbottoms existed in Britain going back to Roman times. They had weathered invasions by Vikings, Saxons, Normans, and the uprisings and downfalls of kings. The Longbottom motto was "Like the earth we endure". The Longbottom title was not strictly patrilineal. If no sons met the criteria a daughter could be selected and her husband would take the name. He had always thought one of Harfang and Callidora's children would get the ring. Neville looked at his Gran.

"Go on put it on."

Neville did. They heard a knock on the door the knock was followed by Harry opening it and entering.

"Lady Longbottom you sent for me?"

"Indeed Harry, I did. Several months ago you offered me an apology for speaking truth rudely to me, I believe that was how you phrased it."

"Yes, Lady Longbottom, I did."

"Is that apology still on the table?"

"Yes."

"I believe, I will accept it at this time. However, if you ever speak that way to me again, I will hex you with a saponificus in a heart beat is that understood?"

"I guess..." Harry said in a confused tone.

"It's a mouth washing hex Harry and it tastes nasty." Neville said.

"Ah. I shall endeavor to remember that Lady Longbottom. Nev, are you okay?"

"Never better, Harry, never better."

A timid house elf popped into the room, with a tureen of tomato soup, a spinach salad with red onion, apples, blueberries, and stilton with blueberry vinegrette, and a pile of mixed grilled cheese with cheddar and grilled cheese with ham and swiss sandwiches. The fare suited the cool spring day. The three sat and ate the lunch. As soon as Neville finished he cast a tempus and yelped. "I gotta go, I already missed half my classes today, I don't want to miss the rest."

Augusta looked at Harry, "What about you?"

"No classes right now."

"Well I do have things to do."

"It was good to see you, Lady Longbottom."

"You as well and remember Harry, it's Lady Augusta." She said as she left.

"I'll remember." Harry idly considered the sandwiches on the plate there were three more and he was still a little hungry. The elf from earlier popped back in. "Would master like a dessert?"

"Why do you call me master? I thought... Aren't you a Hogwarts elf?"

The little elf gulped and then flung herself at Harry's feet. "I is so sorry master I is knowing that I should have stayed with others but I is being so hungry for works and magics I .." she sobbed.

"You're a Potter elf!" Harry thought for a moment. "So are you Penny, Mitzy, or Fara?"

The elf stopped sobbing and looked up at Harry in surprise. "Master knows my name?"

"I know the names of all the Potter elves. So which are you?"

"I is Fara, master."

"Very well Fara." Harry placed a hand on the elf's head. "I accept you as my elf."

"Master is not angry I come to Hogwarts?"

Harry shook his head no.

"I is accepting you as my master!" she broke into a happy and excited little dance.

"Fara are the rest of the Potter elves here?"

"Yes, master."

"Tell them to come to my dorm room this evening. But Fara, except for them, no one else is to know I have renewed your bond. Alright?"

"Why master?"

"Dumbledore."

"Ah, tricky old bumblebee, he would send us away if he knew..master is being very smart. Dessert?"

"Does the kitchen have any carrot raisin muffins?"

Her tennis ball eyes sparkled. "Yes, Master."

"A muffin then."

A couple weeks later Harry finally had his prank for the Weasley twins ready. Neville and Cassandra knew because they helped him research its components and Aaron knew about it since Harry

brewed the potion portion during one of their tutoring sessions. He'd recruited the his elves to get the potion into the twins' food. That night at dinner everyone who knew smiled when out of the blue Fred and George started singing "Ten green bottles sitting on a wall." There were a few snickers but no one recognized the diabolical aspect of the prank until later.

Harry grinned as at breakfast the twins' dorm mates were glaring at the twins as they continued to sing the song at lunch the teachers joined the students. At dinner they themselves looked ready to cry and everyone at the Gryffindor table shunned them.

Neville told him how the twins' housemates the second afternoon had shut the two into a silenced closet because silencing spells on the twins themselves didn't work. Harry laughed and gave Neville a note to give to the twins. It read.

Payback's a bitch isn't it. You'll be singing that song three times through for every time you pranked me. - Son of Prongs P.S. Prank me again and I'll come up with something worse.

It actually took them three days to get through all the repetitions apparently they had been responsible for more of the pranks on him than he'd thought. The note however wound up being a less than good thing . McGonagall found it and assigned him detention for having disrupted the third year classes.

Harry didn't worry about it however. He found himself wildly popular with many in Slytherin after that though. The twins had never been particularly malicious in their pranks, but the Slytherins had been a target more times than they cared for. To see it go back on the two hapless lions amused them to no end. Will and Dan taught him some more specialized shields, and the entire quidditch team took him flying on the pitch each showing him the specifics of their position on the team. Harry made up his mind he would be getting a broom for next year when he did his school shopping. Flying was entirely too much fun.

Snape was torn. In the end the prank on the two annoying lions proved too much to resist. He gave Harry twenty points for a very well planned revenge when no one was around to hear.

Harry and Neville wound up serving two detentions together. The first one was cleaning the trophy room and the highlight for Harry was finding that his dad had been a quidditch captain and chaser for Gryffindor. The second was anything but routine. On the second detention the castle's creepy caretaker Filch led them out to Hagrid's hut.

"Hullo Harry, hullo.."

Harry took pity on Hagrid. "Hagrid this is my friend Neville Longbottom."

"Hullo, Neville"

"Headmaster says we're to go into the forest and figure out what's killing the unicorns. Four have died since March."

Harry wanted to snarl. Sending first years, especially first years that had an incompetent defense teacher into a place deemed dangerous enough to be forbidden to students. Dumbledore was just brilliant, NOT. He supposed they would be safe enough staying with Hagrid. Something powerful enough to prey on unicorns, what was the headmaster thinking? Oh that was right the Headbastard was thinking he wanted to test Harry and since Harry wasn't cooperating he would use the by hook or by crook method. Harry swore the old man had to be senile if not plain out crazy.

They ran into some centaurs and Harry found their cryptic nature very annoying. Then a ways into the forest they found a blood trail and Hagrid proposed they split up.

Neville protested. "But it's not safe!"

"If you need help send up red Sparks. Otherwise yeh' follow the trail of blood going that way and I'll go the other. This way we find the pur beastie sooner." He called Fang and was about to head off.

Harry shook his head in a combination of wry amusement and disbelief at the utter idiocy the giant man displayed. "Fine Hagrid but could you do me a favor first ? See that branch," he pointed to a limb on an oak tree. "could you break that off for me?"

Hagrid frowned but did as asked.

Once the branch was on the ground. Harry transfigured it into two bokken. He had taught Neville about six of the basic strikes and blocks with a bokken using the one in his trunk. He and Neville both knew some magic but they would be better off with the ability to have some sort of physical backup. By using the oak branch he was just about guaranteeing the transfiguration would last. Taking the bokken he set them up with a modified lumos charm. Both wooden swords now glowed with a red light. He handed one to Neville and took the other for himself. They headed off following the blood. The light from the bokken easily giving them enough to see by, and the red color allowing them to keep their night vision as well.

* After walking deeper into the forest for about eight minutes, they found the unicorn. It was dead, its legs lying like sticks at odd angles on the ground. Its mane lying pearly white against the leaves on the ground. They took two steps towards it, when they heard a slithering sound and froze. On the far side of the clearing a bush rustled and a hooded figure crawled forward from the shadows to the body of the unicorn where it lowered its head to the wound in the unicorn's side to drink the blood.

Neville couldn't help himself, he said a half choked "Harry."

The hooded figure raised its head and looked straight at Harry-unicorn blood dribbling down its front. It got to its feet and came swiftly towards them- but neither boy moved from fear.

Then pain pierced Harry's head, like his scar was on fire and he crumpled.

Neville saw Harry fall. Freaking out, he lifted his bokken and charged, swinging the bokken in what Harry called a basic joge-buri (Up down) movement only to get jostled to the side by a charging centaur. Neville watched as the palomino centaur reared and struck at the strange creature forcing it into a retreat. Neville turned to take care of Harry. Sending up red sparks as he did. The centaur soon joined him.

"Are you alright?" It asked as Neville pulled Harry to his feet.

"Yes-thank you-what was that?" Harry said.

The centaur stayed quiet. "You are the Potter boy. You had both better get back to Hagrid. This way."

A moment later the two centaurs they had met earlier came up "Firenze What are you doing?"

"Do you realize who this is? This is the Potter boy. The quicker he leaves this forest the better."

"What have you been telling him?" growled the centaur named Bane from earlier. "Remember, Firenze, we are sworn not to set ourselves against the heavens. Have we not read what is to come in the movements of the planets?"

A third centaur Ronan pawed the ground and said, "I'm sure Firenze thought he was acting for the best."

Bane kicked his back legs obviously angry. "For the best! What is that to do with us? Centaurs are concerned with what has been foretold! It is not our business to run around like donkeys after stray humans in our forest!"

Firenze reared on his hind legs in anger. "Do you not see that unicorn! He bellowed back at Bane. "Do you not understand why it was killed? Or have the planets not let you in on that secret? I set myself against what lurks in this forest Bane, yes, with humans alongside if I must." Firenze took the shoulders of both boys and guided them away from the other two centaurs.

"Why is Bane so angry? Neville asked. "What was that thing you saved us from anyway?"

Firenze was quiet for a bit then asked, "Do you not know what unicorn blood is used for?"

Harry grimly answered, "The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you're an inch from death, but it will be a cursed life from the moment it touches your lips unless the unicorn you got it from gives it willingly."

Firenze nodded. "Just so."

"But who'd be that desperate? Wouldn't death be better?" Neville asked.

"It would be." Firenze agreed. "Unless all you need is to stay alive long enough to drink something else- something that will bring you back to full strength and power-something that means you can never die-"

"The stone." Harry said flatly. "But who?"

"Can you think of nobody who has waited many years to return to power, who has clung to life, awaiting their chance?"

Harry shuddered.

Neville was put in mind of something his Gran had said a week before school. "Neville there are many who believe He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is gone, and maybe that is so, but I don't believe it because there are many dark magics that can prolong life. Maybe Harry Potter finished him I pray that that is so. But I don't bank on it. A baby defeating for good one of the darkest wizards ever? Highly doubtful. I suspect one day he'll return as powerful as ever. You study hard so when he does you're ready to fight him, understood?"

Neville said, "You-Know-Who?"

The same moment Neville spoke Harry ground out, "Voldemort" through gritted teeth.

A loud bark was heard followed by loud footsteps. "Are yeh' boys alright?"

"We're fine Hagrid. The unicorn is dead in a clearing back that way."

Hagrid headed off to examine the unicorn.

"This is where I leave you, you will be safe now," said Firenze. "Good Luck Harry Potter. The planets have been read wrongly before even by centaurs." then he turned and cantered into the forest.*

Harry grimaced. "Luck is for those that can't plan, and I don't believe in leaving things to chance."

"Harry what stone?" Neville asked.

"I'll explain later. Right now, I need to think."

Hagrid and Fang returned, then Hagrid headed back towards the school. Neville and Harry followed Hagrid the rest of the way from the forest. As they neared the school they noticed an odd glow in the night sky. As they exited the last of the trees they noticed Hagrid's hut was aflame. Hagrid shouted, "Norbert!"

Chapter 18 Disturbing Things

The partners of Davies, Corner, and Ogden were thrilled they had been called to a meeting to discuss an out of court settlement with Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent.

After polite greetings had been exchanged. Horace said, "Shall we go straight to business gentlemen?"

He grinned as they paled but agreed. Stephen and Perseus had agreed to let him do all the arguing since that was his specialty. "Now first I want to verify a few things. You became the legal firm representing the Potter family how?"

"Albus Dumbledore named us to the position November 5th 1980."

"Did he give you any instructions?"

"Just to look after the Potters' interests."

"That's it?"

Elphais Doge looked nervously at his partners. They exchanged glances then he nervously said "Yes."

"Did James Potter confirm this appointment?"

"No, he was in hiding with his family by that point."

"And after the Potters were killed?"

"Albus said, 'Look after young Harry's interests.'"

Horace gave a wolfish smile and said, "Precisely how is allowing the press and others to lionize a child instead of protecting his privacy, allowing the ministry to take a piece of his property, and failing to see to it that the goblins had permission to invest Lord Potter's gold, oh, and my personal favorite, failing to see his guardian got the funds to provide for him, seeing to his interests?"

The four wizards looked at him in dismay.

"No gentlemen, I and my partners have our instructions. There will be no quiet out of court settlement. The wizarding world will have to answer for their outrageous behavior towards a small orphaned child that saved them; as will you and Albus Dumbledore. Good day, gentlemen."

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Mrs. Petunia Dursley,

My apologies, you are correct in that I and my partners should have directly consulted you on the matter of Harry's magical guardianship. It was just we were together and Tiberius and Lady Augusta were there and either of them would be an unassailable guardian even for Dumbledore and Tiberius suggested it and we were all willing. This way has some definite advantages for you. As physical guardian what you say goes unless all of us agree that whatever you want is improper. Harry seemed fine with the idea when it was mentioned to him, and you are correct when you say those of us that are magical don't usually bother to consult non magicals. Again our apologies.

Good news. Per your recommendations to gain access/control of the media for future benefit of Harry, we have worked closely with the goblins at Gringott's. Unlike most wizarding solicitors we believe a working relationship with the quiet economic power of our world is a good thing. With their help we have acquired interest in the Wizarding Times, the Daily Prophet, and Wizarding Wireless Network. Only a small percentages at this time, but as more shares become available it will increase.

The publishers of the series of children's books about your nephew have agreed to settle out of court for thirty percent ownership of the company. At first they were reluctant to do so until as per your suggestion we presented them with the facts and figures of how their line of books about Harry was sixty percent of their book sales for the last nine years. And how damaging to their reputation it would be being seen as war profiteers, in addition to the fact that the books are completely libelous. Forcing us to go to court would likely result in us gaining complete ownership.

But what makes this really good news is the fact this publishing house also publishes Witch Weekly. Harry could use this publication to increase both his own profits and build a solid reputation. As

second majority owner, (The original owner holds forty percent of the company.) he will have great influence over what gets printed if he wishes. We do plan on acquiring additional shares of this concern as well. It would be such a shame if Harry's ownership were to increase. In addition to the ownership percentage they are reclassifying the books as fiction and will publish a one eighth page notice that the stories are fictional in Witch Weekly.

I know you wished especially to, how did you phrase it? "I want to have that woman's guts for garters." with regards to Rita Skeeter. I don't blame you, however Ms. Skeeter is an exceedingly popular journalist with a strong tendency to scoop her competitors that writes for the main newspaper of the magical world the Daily Prophet. Instead of pursuing a libel suit. I recommend gathering even more evidence on her less savory aspects. I have an investigator digging for as much dirt on her as I can collect. My intention is to hold it as leverage over her head so she'll print what we want, when we want. Having a hold over such a viperous reporter could only benefit Harry.

The custody court date is the day following Harry's return, and the other trials are spread over the next three days. The injunctions Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent have been trying to bury us in, have failed to garner them support and will run out by that date. So it would probably be wise for you to plan to stay in London a few days. Unfortunately many of the charges leveled won't stick very well to the Chief Warlock he's been clever enough to put a few scapegoats between himself and the mess this will cause. The one we won't have trouble with is the obstruction of due process. If there are other things that we could use please let us know.

Sincerely, Stephen Corner

Mr. Corner,

I will make plans to stay in London per your recommendation. I would like for you to come to tea so we can discuss going to court next week Friday at 4:30 p.m. The goblins have assured me that the wards shouldn't present a problem. I live at #4 Privet Drive Little Whinging ,Surrey. Please dress muggle so the neighbors don't notice.

Sincerely, Petunia Dursley

The invitation to tea to discuss the case couldn't have been timed worse. Stephen had back to back meetings , Horace was in court, and Perseus and Tabitha had taken a trip before Roger returned from Hogwarts. "Felicia, my love, what's your day like?"

"It's pretty open. Why?"

"I need you to go to Petunia Dursley's for tea and conversation. I was going to do trial prep with her, but my day turned hectic, and seems to want to get worse."

"Take a deep breath, I can do that if I have a list of questions."

At 4:30 that afternoon Felicia knocked on the door of #4 Privet Drive.

Petunia opened the door expecting to see someone obviously from the magical world and instead she found a woman dressed neatly in a dress that while slightly behind current fashion was still current enough to be unremarkable. "Can I help you?"

"Mrs Dursley? I'm Felicia Corner. Stephen Corner's wife, he sent me here in his stead to do some trial preparation and just to chat. I work for the firm as well and I'm on Harry's magical trustee board."

"Come in, I guess I was expecting someone more obviously magical."

"I'm what they call muggle born."

"Like my sister then?"

"Exactly so." Felicia looked around her. The house was very tidy not particularly large but of a size that would be comfortable for four to five people. There were photographs on the walls, most seemed to be of Mrs. Dursley and two stocky blonds, although there were a few with Harry in them. "You have a lovely home."

"Thank you. How do you take your tea?"

"Lemon and one lump. Shall we get started?" At Petunia Dursley's nod she asked, "When did you first meet Albus Dumbledore?"

"When he came and informed myself and Vernon we were not allowed to move away from here until the wards fell when Harry was seventeen, on the very day we planned to move. Harry would have been three then."

"Wait, you mean you didn't meet him when he brought Harry to you and a toddler?"

"No he left Harry on the doorstep like a bottle of milk in November. Can you imagine?. I'm surprised Harry didn't develop pneumonia. The stress of losing his family and then getting cold like that."

Felicia worked her way through the questions and worked herself into a towering rage. She and Petunia actually hit it off something about Petunia could see her outrage about what had been inflicted on Petunia and her family by Dumbledore. When they got to the part about the infertility and the bind on Harry's magic, Felicia's tea cup shattered.

"Oh I'm so sorry, it's just I'm so furious at what that man has done to you. I understand your not liking magic, in your shoes I would probably hate it and anyone associated with it, but do you mind if I fix this?"

Petunia hesitated but the shattered cup was part of a tea service from her grandmother. "Go ahead."

Felicia pulled her wand and waved it "Reparo. That's simply monstrous. Doesn't he... probably not. I am so sorry that he has done this to you, no one should ever make that sort of decision for someone else without consulting them first, how dare he take your right to have more children away from you, and then not to even care enough to get the name of your son correct. It's probably just as well he's behind anti apparition wards or I'd be tempted to hex him to death and land myself in Azkaban."

Felicia got through the questions Stephen had given her and a few she had come up with on her own. She was thinking if she had any others when the older of the two blonds from the photographs came in. Petunia introduced him as her husband Vernon.

"Very nice to meet you. Felicia Corner did you say?" He tried to figure out where he had heard that name.

"Yes."

"I didn't see your car outside."

"You wouldn't I apparated here."

He got a shocked look on his face.

"Yes Vernon, Felicia is a witch. Her husband is Harry's solicitor."

Felicia nearly chuckled.

"You look very normal for someone from that lot. Pet, my tea?"

"On the counter in the kitchen, the thermos is next to the fridge. You may have the scone on the plate along with the watercress sandwich that is in the fridge, but that's all. Dinner will be in an hour and a half."

"On that note Mrs. Dursley I'll bid you good evening. You've given us lots to work with and more questions to figure out answers to. Thank you for the tea. Do you mind if I use your back yard to leave?"

"Go ahead. It was very nice meeting you Felicia. Perhaps we could do this again."

"I'd like that."

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A week later Perseus Davies had had a free afternoon so to help his partners he took a section of the questions in the Potter file to the ministry to get answers. He found out that for Harry to hear the prophecy about himself he merely needed to present himself to the desk at the department of mysteries and he would be taken to where he could get it from the shelf and taken to a private room where he could hear it play.

The next set of questions however lead to a very nasty shock.

"What do you mean there was no trial? How can anyone be sent to Azkaban without a trial?"

"I'm sorry sir but Sirius Black never got a trial because there is no record."

"On whose order's?"

"Bartemius Crouch's sir"

"All right thank you." Perseus thanked the court clerk. He frowned this was bad. Bartemius Crouch hated Death Eaters that was a given. The man was known for his lack of mercy, but for him to have gotten away with condemning someone of an ancient and noble house without a trial said more was going on. Others, powerful others had to be involved. Given the man in question was Harry Potter's legal guardian by his parents' wills, it implied there was more behind it than met the eye. He would have to approach this cautiously or the repercussions might be severe. He'd get the others in on this.

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Cassandra trembled as she opened the letter from her father. It had come at breakfast but she'd been afraid to open it . Now classes were over for the day, and she no longer had the excuse of not wanting to be to upset for class.

Daughter,

As usual you have proven to be a great disappointment to me I have contacted all your teachers and while you will pass your classes it is not by the virtue of your magic alone which means you are likely to fail your NEWTS and be unable to get a position. Your lack of magic also means that a suitable marital match to a young man is unlikely. Therefore I have arranged a match with Jasper Houghton.

I'm sure you remember him from last Christmas he was quite taken with you and since he already has an heir your lack of magic isn't a problem. The wedding will take place at the end of June

Cassandra dropped the letter. Jasper Houghton, he was older than father and the looks he gave her absolutely made her flesh crawl. She wouldn't marry him, never ever in a million years, she die first. But what choice did she have? She only had what her parents gave

her and she was unlikely to get a job because of her grades. She couldn't help herself tears started to flow.

Harry was wandering through the stacks looking for a quiet table to work on his school end of year prank when he found Cassandra. "Sandra? What's wrong why are you crying?"

Cassandra looked up into the concerned green eyes of a young boy who had offered months ago to help with her problems. "My father." She broke off unable to continue. She gestured towards the letter.

Harry picked it up and after seeking her permission with his eyes he read it. "Somehow I don't think congratulations are in order."

Cassandra broke into soggy sounding chuckles. "That's an understatement but what else can I do?"

"Do parents in the magical world do this often? Tell their children who to marry?"

"Usually people's magic guides them towards someone compatible. Then the families arrange terms. By doing this my father is saying I'm not magical enough to find someone. Given I haven't felt a pull to anyone he may be right."

"But by your reaction I'm guessing you hate the guy?"

"Understatement."

"Then what you need is another option. Before the wedding."

"The sooner the better."

"Cassandra you know I'm from an Ancient and Noble family right?"

"Well, yeah everyone kinda knows that, I'm not saying you rub it in people's faces it's just everyone in the European magical world and probably the Americas knows that about the Potters."

"In the muggle world someone with as much money and responsibilities as me usually has a secretary, or umm, a personal assistant who deals with mail, errands, making appointments, that sort of thing. I would like to hire you as my assistant. I even know

what I'll have you do. I have a house in the country that needs to have someone arrange to finish it. I need someone to do a bunch of research and I know you're good at that. My home has had a mail ward up since I was a baby so somewhere there's a ton of old fan mail to be sorted through. I probably can't pay you much but I have an apartment building in London I could include one of those apartments in your pay. What do you say?"

Cassandra looked at the young face looking into hers with such seriousness. "You mean this don't you? Why Harry? I'm a Yaxley, my father probably fought yours in the last war."

"You aren't your father. I like to think we've become friends over the last couple months. Besides if I help you I fully expect in the long run for you to return the favor. All I'm giving you is an opportunity, it's up to you what you make of it. One thing I've noticed about the wizarding world, you all get so hung up in traditions and who your families are that you miss the reality that what really matters is doing what's right and good, being with those you love, and being happy. Hufflepuffish of me I know, but it really is what I believe."

Chapter 19 Going After the Stone Anyway

Harry put down his quill he was now officially done with his first year of Hogwarts. He really hoped Quirrell wasn't the defense teacher next year. Harry was 99 percent sure, the creepy stuttering man was behind the headaches and the work his pendant did every time he went to Defense. He had learn way more defense from Will and Dan than from the bumbling idiot Dumbledore hired. Sometimes Harry and the other Slytherins joked that Dumbledore hired such losers because he didn't want anyone to be good enough to challenge his position. Harry was in a comfortable place. About half his house seemed to like him, even some of the kids that had families of the bigoted pureblood type. Marcus and the rest of the Quidditch team had encouraged him to join them next year.

An hour later Harry waited in the classroom he and Neville used for training all year. Neville was supposed to join him for a celebratory tea. It wasn't like Neville to be late. Where was he? Harry used the map. What in heavens name was Neville doing near the third floor corridor with Quirrell?

Harry called "Sid."

"Yes master?"

"Get my bokken from my trunk and the sheath of shuriken."

Harry had transfigured a sheath of six throwing stars. It was probably illegal but as far as Harry was concerned when dealing with enemies keeping them far away was preferable. The stars would give him the option of distance. The elf popped back with the requested items. "Thanks."

Harry slipped through the hallways checking his map for both movement from Neville and Quirrell and for those that would spy on him. Dumbledore, who he would have been half tempted to go to, to say "you made this problem now solve it," wasn't even in the castle. The old sour tabby was hiding in her office. And his head of house wouldn't give a crap because Neville was a hated lion. He approached the third floor with caution. When he reached the infamous door he checked the map one more time. Yes, Neville was here right next to Quirrell. Harry cleared the map.

"Alohomora"

"So the famous boy hero joins us."

Neville was tied and gagged he had bruises to show he'd tried to put up a fight and Quirrell held his wand to Neville's nape there was a glow indicating a held spell.

"What do you want Quirrell?"

"Oh I think you know."

"The stone."

Quirrell's lips tipped upward. "And Albus thought his little trap didn't interest you. I should have guessed that as a snake you would be canny enough to figure out it was a test. I'd be interested to see if you can pass them and to know the answer to Albus' question."

"Why? Why drag Neville and I into this? Why not just go get it yourself?"

"I already tried that. Something at the end eludes me, since this scenario was designed to test you. I figure you're my solution. And he," Quirrell pushed his wand into Neville's neck. "is my means of forcing you to do as I want."

Harry grimaced. Quirrell had indeed found the one thing Harry could think of that would make him cooperate.

"Fine." Harry glanced at the sleeping cerebus. "Thanks for the music. Since music soothes the savage beast." He moved to the trapdoor. "Care to clue me in about what's next?"

"No, you have an hour and a half, Potter to get back with the stone or he dies. And I'll figure out some other way to get the stone for my master. Tick-tock."

Harry grimaced. 'Crap.' He lowered himself through the trapdoor in a reverse chin-up. It was disquieting to hang suspended in the dark. He let go with one hand and grabbed his wand from where he tucked it behind his ear before going through the trapdoor. "Lumos"

A large plant shrank away from the light. Harry recognized Devil's Snare. "Solaris" he called out a brighter warmer version of the light spell. As soon as the plant left him a clear space on land he let go and dropped to the floor. He moved to the next barrier. A locked door Harry eye the flock of what he thought was birds and realized they were keys. He noted there were broomsticks near by but that would take a while. He looked carefully at the lock then looked at the keys, looking for the one that matched. Finally he spotted it, "Accio antique silver key bird with damaged wing!" The bird fluttered ineffectually against the summoning spell. Harry got it in the lock and opened the door. Beyond which was a chess board. Harry frowned, after he verified that he would have to play his way across. Then he took the role of the black king. He really wished he knew more spells instead of having to play his way across. It took him thirty five minutes to put the white king in checkmate. As he opened the door to the next room it was painfully obvious what was in the room thankfully it was also out cold. Harry hurried past the knocked out troll, he had only forty minutes left.

The next room he reasoned must be Snape's, he was shocked when flames leaped up behind him after crossing the threshold. "Fabulous." He approached the table and it's seven bottles and a paper with a riddle on it.

* Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind, two of us will help you ,whichever you would find, one among us seven will let you move ahead, another will transport the drinker back instead, two among our number hold only nettle wine, three of us are killers waiting hidden in line. Choose unless you wish to stay here forevermore, to help you in your choice, we give you these clues four: first however slyly the poison tried to hide you will always find some on nettle wine's left side; second different are those that stand at either end but if you would move onward neither is your friend; third as you see clearly all are different size neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their inside; Fourth the second left and the second right are twins once you taste them though different at first sight. *

Harry shrugged might as well try the easy way first. "Accio forward potion." Nothing happened. He couldn't be that lucky twice. He read through the clues again. Logic okay he could do this. He went through the clues twice more then he grabbed the smallest bottle. He drank it and moved through the flames towards the next door. He entered a large room with a mirror in the center. Across the top were

letters: Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi. Harry read through the letters three more times to figure out what they meant. He and Dudley had played around with codes starting when they were seven, sensei had introduced Harry to the concepts of code breaking and Harry had played with it one of the simplest codes... Wait mirror, mirror writing. I show not your face but your heart's desire. Okay there was only one door from this room which meant the stone was in this room Harry would bet it was somehow hidden by the mirror. No wonder Quirrell had so much trouble.

Dumbledore wanted to protect the stone from Voldemort who wanted to use it . Therefore to get the stone you had to not want it to use it. This could be a problem, of course Harry had the advantage of knowing that this stone wasn't the real one. Harry briefly wondered if Dumbledore was aware or if he thought it was the real one. Harry decided if there was ever a time to practice occlumency this was it. He swiftly settled into a meditative trance "I'm trying to protect the stone" became his mantra. And it was true he wanted to protect the real stone. He stepped to the mirror and in the mirror he saw himself taking the stone and tucking it in his pocket. He felt it appear in his trouser pocket. "Yes! Tempus." Harry saw he had a mere ten minutes left. He vacated the mirror room swiftly quaffed a mouthful of the potion to get him back through the flames. He edged past the troll that was just starting to stir. He was relieved he didn't have to play his way back across the chess board. Grabbing a broom from the keys room, he cried out "Solaris" and flew through the devil's snare room up to the trapdoor and listened before going through.

He overheard Quirrell saying to Neville, "I'm not sure if I want your friend to succeed or fail, either way I benefit. Of course I'll probably kill you. After all there are only three minutes remaining. Tick-Tock." Followed by a maniacal laugh.

Neville had tried to worm his way into loosening his bindings with little success. He wondered what dangers Harry was facing on his behalf. He couldn't believe how stupid, stuttering, Quirrell had suddenly turned deadly. He had figured out that something was very off about their professor and it wasn't his turban. At times it seemed the professor was having a conversation with another, but there was no one else in the room.

Harry put his wand between his teeth, and put the stone in his other hand, he planned to go through the door hard and fast jump clear of the broom then threaten to smash the stone to smithereens. It wasn't much of a plan but it was all he had. Time to put thought to action.

Harry's entrance was noticeable enough. Both Neville and Quirrell jumped. "Let him go Quirrell or your precious stone is dust. For your information I know reductio, and I'm not joking."

"My, my, I'm impressed."

"Don't be. I mean it. Release Neville."

Quirrell took two steps away from Neville but towards the door and smiled menacingly before saying "Finite. So what now?"

Neville rubbed at his wrists and at the corners of his mouth where the gag had hurt him.

"You okay, Nev?"

Neville moved toward Harry without getting himself in the potential line of fire. He nodded, these had been the most terrifying hours of his life since the attack on his parents. As he got close he could see a mix of determination and fear in Harry's green eyes.

"So now what, boy hero?"

"You let us go, and I let you have the stone."

"Harry, no!" Neville protested. "You can't let him have what he wants."

Both Harry and Quirrell ignored him. "So I'm supposed to take the stone and just leave and believe that you and your little friend won't be coming after me or better yet sending the teachers after me. Do you really believe me such a fool?"

"You're enough of a fool to drink unicorn blood."

"Let me face him," came a voice that was not Quirrell's.

"Master no you are not strong enough."

"I have strength enough...for this..."

Then Quirrell unwrapped his turban. Revealing one head with two faces.

"Harry Potter..."

Harry tried to take a step backward but his legs wouldn't move.

"See what I have become?" the second face said "Mere shadow and vapor...I only have form when I share another's body...but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds...Unicorn blood has strengthened me these past weeks...you saw faithful Quirrell drinking it for me in the forest...and once I have the Elixir of Life, I will create a body of my own...Now give me the stone." #

Harry at this point really wanted to pass out from the pain in his forehead but knew if he gave into it, he and his godbrother would both die. Harry thought as best he could. Impasse, Neville is free but we're trapped here with him. Time to change the status quo. "Hey Voldie, you want the stone go get it." He threw it with all the force he could muster through the trapdoor. He grabbed Neville arm and ran full tilt to the door. They had barely cleared the door when a bright green spell hit and shattered the door frame After months of running both boys had no trouble going in a full sprint for the closest hidden passage.

"Harry we have to tell the Headmaster."

"I know." Part of Harry was just ornery enough to look forward to the horrified look the man would get if he was unaware that the stone was counterfeit.

Twenty minutes later, Harry got to enjoy the headmaster's expression it was even more horrified that he had thought it would be. What was even better was all the heads of houses were there as well. "Voldemort has the stone? Do you have any idea what you have done!"

Harry couldn't help it; it was too much he snickered.

Snape exploded."You have handed the Darkest Lord in centuries a means of immortality and the means to finance his every whim! How can you sit there and snicker!"

"The stone wasn't real." Harry said calmly.

A moment later Neville broke into giggles. While the adults just sat there, jaws dropped.

"Do you honestly think me stupid enough that I would hand over a real philosopher's stone to someone like Quirrellmort? Hell no. I'm not that stupid. Of course I wouldn't have been stupid enough to bring something like that real or fake, to a school of children. He was threatening to kill my godbrother, so by my book headmaster your little test endangered a student's life. I figured out your little test months ago, I contacted Nicholas Flammel who advised me to ignore it and I would've but Quirrell grabbed Nev. That's how I know the stone is fake and how I know your so called protections were nothing but a test, after all a first year got by them. What I don't know is why? Why test me and why is Voldemort after me?"

"Alas, what you ask I cannot answer. Not today, when you are older."#

"Bullshit! You've been playing god with my life since my parents died!"

"Mr. Potter! How dare you speak to the Headmaster that way?" McGonagall yelled.

"Easily if I don't stand up for me, I can't expect anyone else to."

"Professor McGonagall, I think I want my Gran to be here before this goes any further. She's a member of Harry's trustee board." Neville spoke.

"Mr. Longbottom be quiet. As for you, Mr. Potter, your parents would be mortified to hear the way you are speaking to the Headmaster."

"No, you listen, you, prejudiced old biddy. My parents might be mortified by what I've said, but that doesn't really matter does it? Because they're dead. Dead, because they followed the senile old

geezer, the Headmaster, and it lead to their deaths. But heck that wasn't the only bad judgement they showed. They named you third in line to be my guardian and we know how that turned out. Me, left on a doorstep in November being raised by muggles, and the revered headmaster binding my magic when I was four. I find you people laughable. Maybe you're foolish enough to take every word Albus Dumbledore speaks as something being told to you by a god, because he's an important, powerful wizard, but I won't. There is nothing you can say to me to persuade me that the headmaster is a good and worthy of respect person, because my life is a testament to the fact he's a manipulative old bastard." Harry stood there panting with spent fury.

"Mr Potter. Two Hundred points from Slytherin. Get yourself down to your dorm room and plan on staying there until you leave on the train." Came Snape's low menacing growl. "How dare you address the Headmaster that way?"

"Easily, just as I dare say that the people in this room, save Nev, are some of the blindest and most gutless I've ever seen. I'm leaving, and I'll be glad to stay in my dorm."

Neville was shocked. Snape frogmarched Harry towards the door. He looked at his head of house he looked at Flitwick and Sprout. "Aren't you going to do anything? He saved me, he faced all those dangers to do it an you are just going to stand there and let them do this ! Harry's got it right! You people need to take your heads out of your arses, or is it the Headmasters arse? And-"

"A hundred points from Gryffindor" Minerva snarled.

"Another hundred points from Gryffindor." Snape said from the door. When Minerva gave him a dirty look he said in a reasonable tone. "For inappropriate language."

Professors Flitwick and Sprout were torn between being appalled at Harry and Neville's behavior and being appalled at hearing the accusations of what the Headmaster had been up to with regards to the safety of the students of the school. Bluntly stated as the boys had done it, it made them wonder why they hadn't recognized the danger and said something to stop it themselves. They also were surprised to hear that Minerva had the responsibility to take Harry in after his parents died, but for whatever reason had not done so.

Harry didn't exactly obey his confinement to the Slytherin dorm. He used his dad's cloak to slip out and place the spells for his end of year prank. Aaron had supervised his brewing the potion and the Potter elves would be coating the silverware before the final feast. Neville knew about the prank and approved. Harry had originally figured he would be hit by it like the other students, but with his confinement no one would question why he wasn't. Harry knew his prank wasn't very nice but that didn't worry him.

At the end of year feast, the yellow and black banners hung for the first time in a hundred twenty four years. Ravenclaw had been stomped in the end of year quidditch match with Gryffindor and had ended placing twelve points behind the Hufflepuffs for the House Cup. The snakes and the lions who had been leading for the house cup the previous week were loath to explain the sudden point losses. But from the way Neville was getting glared at and the absence of Harry Potter at the feast, it was surmised they were responsible.

The feast was two thirds over when people throughout the room noticed their foreheads itching.

Harry's conspirators smiled as words appeared on the foreheads of everyone in the room even the teachers. Neville knew his own said squib, Hermione's read ignoramus, he noted Ron's read nobody. He had sat close to the teacher's table so he'd be able to read at least some of theirs. Dumbledore's read Dark Lord. Snape's interestingly enough read James Potter. Sinistra's read my mother. Flitwick and McGonagall's both read incompetent Vector's read idiot. Many of the Gryffindors' read coward. Oddly the Weasley twins read bullies. Many kids were responding at first by laughing as they read their peers' foreheads until they heard what was on their own. That was the evil side of Harry's prank everyone's worst fear about themselves being put on display for the whole world to read. It was a large group of sober students that boarded the Hogwarts Express the next day.

Chapter 20 Heigh-ho Heigh-ho It's Off to Court We Go

If anyone had been watching the students board the Hogwarts' Express the next day they would have wondered who died, they would not have believed that this was the end of the school year. Most students still had the words on their foreheads, and most didn't raise their eyes past other people's waists. The oldest students had used glamor charms to hide theirs but many below sixth year weren't capable of the complex version required to hide the word.

Harry shared a compartment with Aaron, Cassandra, and Neville. Aaron handed Cassandra and Neville each a vial of potion. "Once you're away from the station drink that. The words will disappear. Everyone else will have to wait for what they ate at the feast to clear their digestive tracks, another day or so."

"So Harry, I didn't look at the boards for the firsties. What was your placement?" Cassandra asked.

"I tied for second with Padma Patil. Granger got first. Boot got third, Bones and Corner and Goldstien tied for forth. Neville here tied with Malfoy for fifth. Great job by the way, Nev. Grenngrass and Davis got sixth along with Brocklehurst. After that I didn't notice."

"That's impressive. Most years you don't see that many ties. I have to ask, rumor has it you two were behind the last minute point losses is that true?" Cassandra said.

Harry and Neville both winced. "Guilty."

"Why? How? What did you two do?" Aaron groaned.

"Well...we kinda told off the Heads..." Neville started.

"And let's not forget the Headbastard himself." Harry finished.

"One question. Why?" Aaron asked.

"Yeah, why?" Cassandra asked.

"Well remember how at the first of year feast..." Harry started. He recounted all the details of Dumbledore's test pointing out how it endangered the students.

As Harry came to an end, Neville pointed out the massive inequality about the way points were given and taken by the teachers and how despite headmaster saying inter house unity he had been pressured all year to give up his friendship with "that Slytherin". Concluding, "I could do what is easy and say nothing, or I can do what is right and speak up. Of course when I get back to Gran I may regret having opened my mouth, because I think she'll be angry with me. But what's done is done, and can't be changed."

"Speaking of changes Harry did you contact the goblins, about my working for you?" Cassandra asked.

"Yeah, I can pay you twenty two galleons a week and provide an apartment. It's not much, but it should allow you to get by. The apartment is muggle though so it will probably be an adjustment for you."

"That's actually really good pay by wizarding standards, especially with a flat thrown in. So what is it I'll be doing?"

"The biggest thing I'm going to want you to do right off is coordinate getting Potter Manse rebuilt. Which will mean helping me figure out what it should look like finished, soliciting bid's from contractors, buying supplies that sort of thing. Aunt Petunia suggested that she stay with you the next few days to make sure you understand all the muggle stuff in your flat while I stay upstairs with the elves. It's the same building just different floors. I, I mean, we'll be pretty busy with court stuff at the ministry for the next week. Oh um, Mr. Corner had some paperwork that both of us need to fill out and sign, I'm not sure so don't ask me. Have you told your Dad yet?"

"This might be cowardly of me, but no."

"Are you going to?" Neville asked, he was only partly privy to what was going on.

"I'd rather just disappear. Because I think my dad will go crazy, Jasper Houghton offered a huge settlement."

Harry smirked, "I've an idea. Write him a note. Aaron can deliver it on the platform and I'll loan you my cloak you'll be able to watch his reaction."

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"DEAREST FATHER,

If you want the settlement from Jasper Houghton that badly, marry him yourself. I have a job and do not have to do as you say! Love and kisses Cassandra!

"How dare she! That is it! Angelica that squib has defied me for the last time she is no longer a Yaxley!" Robert Yaxley bellowed as he read the note from his defiant daughter.

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Marcus Flint knew he should be furious with Harry Potter for losing Slytherin the House Cup, but as he watched the fit his uncle threw because his favorite cousin had slipped out of her father's grasp some how he couldn't help but grin about the Boy-Who-Lived. He wondered if Harry had been behind the end of year prank it lacked the Weasley twins' lighter more amusing touch. Harry had shown a dab hand at putting together a difficult prank. Forcing people to be honest at least with themselves after the long months of being treated poorly struck him as something Harry would do. For the moment the twins were getting the grief but sooner or later people would remember the prank payback on the twins and figure out it was him.

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Stephen Corner and Horace Ogden were nervous. Tomorrow they were beginning what would probably be a make or break into the big time case for their firm. They were also nervous because their premiere client had chosen to hire as a personal assistant, the child of one of the second scariest non imprisoned Death Eaters. Between the trustee board members they had decided for his safety they would ask the young woman for an oath of loyalty to Lord Potter. Hopefully she didn't take offense.

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Petunia waited on the other side of the barrier. Moments later Harry appeared. Next to him was a young woman. She was young and horribly out of fashion. Her honey blond hair hung to the backs of her knees. Petunia frowned.

Harry smiled at her. "Aunt Petunia may I present Cassandra Yaxley. Cassandra this is my Aunt, Petunia Dursley."

"Mrs. Dursley, It's a pleasure."

"Miss Yaxley. Well come on." She led the way from King's Cross to the closet Underground Station they traveled to the apartment building.

Cassandra had to admit that while it took a while, muggle travel lacked the discomfort of magical travel. She was puzzled by Harry's aunt, the woman had looked her up and down shaken her hand and then ignored her. On the trip to the apartment the older woman had pulled out a note book and started a list.

When they reached the building, Harry said, "Alright Cassandra do you remember how elevators work?"

She nodded.

"The flat is on the ninth floor. 907 to be exact."

She led the way to the flat; feeling a thrill of satisfaction as she correctly worked the elevator. When they reached the door the older woman handed her a key. Right keys and locks, she closed her eyes to remember then she inserted the key and opened the door. The apartment was not large. Coming in the door to the right was the kitchen. It had an 14.4 . refrigerator with a cabinet above it then another set of cabinets with a small.7cu. in. microwave mounted beneath it. Then a twenty inch range and oven after which one more set of cabinets then there was a small door to a closet that ran about the width of the kitchen which wasn't very large. Opposite the wall with the appliances and the cabinets was more counters a bar type sitting area and a kitchen sink with the counters on that side running just short of the refrigerator. It opened out onto a living room that had a french door onto a small balcony overlooking the street. On the left side of the living room was a doorway to a small hallway.

Cassandra went in looked down the hall. On the right was a bedroom, on the left a bathroom and at the end of the hall was a closet. The closet off the kitchen proved to be a storage area the closet at the end of the hall had a stackable washer and dryer. The flat had basic and simple furnishings. "Oh boy." She breathed out. She looked at Mrs. Dursley. "Will you teach me how to use these? I grew up in a magical home and we had elves. I only know what muggle studies taught and I know from talking to Harry that means I'm helpless as a babe. I mean I understand money but what I know about this side of the world would fit in a teacup. I need to learn this, because I suck at magic."

Petunia looked at the young woman. She was disarmed by the earnest expression on the girls face. "Do you have money dear?"

"Some, it's all magical though."

"Well, you'll probably need an advance on the salary Harry is paying you in any case. You and I will discuss things. Harry, I believe you're expected upstairs."

"Yes, Aunt Petunia. Did Barchok give you the key for the elevator? My portkey won't work from within the building."

Petunia handed it to him.

"Okay, I'll leave you two to get acquainted then." Harry took the key and left.

"Miss Yaxley, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt because you're young, but for the next six years until Harry is of age assuming things work out, you work for me as much as him. He has some ideas of what you'll be doing but only a few. You will earn the money he pays you, or you will be out the door are we clear?"

"Yes ma'am."

"If you're living in the muggle world and representing us we'll need to do something about your clothes and that hair. Also you'll need linens, dishes and food for the kitchen, which means shopping. At Harry's request I got the phone and utilities turned on. Do you understand budgeting?"

"Not very well, with magic, transfiguration and charms make our lives a lot more flexible."

"Are you capable of such magic?"

"No ma'am."

"Then we have a lot of work ahead of us. I hope you are as smart as Harry seems to think you are."

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The next morning Harry came down and knocked on Cassandra's door. He had a basket of food pressed on him by Zinnia and they only had an hour before they were due at the ministry. Harry was shocked when Cassandra opened the door. "Whoa."

She self-consciously put her hand to her hair. Yesterday Mrs. Dursley had taken her to a hairdresser who had cut her hair from where it touched the floor when she was sitting into a pageboy that was just past her collar bone. She had also gotten her a muggle wardrobe. She had gotten what Mrs. Dursley called basics: dishes, pans, cleaning supplies, and linens. There had also been a stop at a muggle bookstore where she bought four books one on budgeting, one on homemaking, and two cookbooks. Cassandra figured she now owed Harry two months of work. She had spent her graduation gift money on her new look and that was as far as it went. Mrs. Dursley had loaned her the money for all the stuff for her flat. She was somewhat embarrassed to realize Mrs. Dursley had brought her own linens from home so she could sleep on the sofa. Cassandra had insisted that Mrs. Dursley take the full size bed in the bedroom and slept on the sofa herself. Taking a shower had been interesting she had first froze herself then scalded herself before figuring out how to adjust the water temperature because it didn't automatically come out of the spigot at a comfortable temperature. She saw the basket of breakfast Harry carried and almost cried with relief. She really hadn't looked forward to trying to figure out her muggle appliances yet and they hadn't gone to a grocery last night. "I look ridiculous."

"No, actually it suits you. You could probably go even a bit shorter but you'll want to keep it trimmed. If it gets much longer it makes your face look long."

"Come on in. Your aunt is almost ready. It's good you brought food cause there's nothing here."

"Cassandra you know where the Ministry of Magic is Right?"

"We'll just use your floo."

"But my aunt can't, she's muggle."

"I hadn't thought of that..."

"Fortunately you don't have to. Mrs. Corner made sure I knew where to go. Thank you for bringing breakfast Harry." They sat down and swiftly ate the breakfast the elves had made. Thirty minutes later they were at the ministry.

Horace Ogden met them along with both Felicia and Stephen Corner. The men led them to a consultation room where they went over the custody case. Then the men lead Petunia and Harry to the courtroom while Felicia asked to speak with Cassandra a moment.

After the door closed Felicia spoke, "Are you taking advantage of Harry's good nature?"

Cassandra considered how it might look from an adult's perspective. "I don't intend to, but I suppose it looks as though I am."

"Are you willing to take a magical oath that you will keep all his business private?"

"Yes. Mrs. Corner, I know I come from a family that you and Harry's other trustees would rather he have nothing to do with. But I'm an almost squib and this job with Harry means I don't have to marry Jasper Houghton. I will do everything in my power not to do anything to mess this up because I find the alternative unacceptable. If that means making an oath so be it."

Felicia looked at the young woman before her. Felicia pulled out the paper that contained the oath that everyone that worked at their firm was required to give. She penned a small change to it making it harry not the firm and its clients and handed it to Cassandra.

Cassandra read it then pulled her wand, "I, Cassandra Minionette Yaxley, swear on my magic," She added a phrase not on the paper. "and my life, to hold private all information about Lord Harry James Potter that I learn in the course of my duties," and she added a second phrase, "and do my utmost to look after his best interests."

Felicia was startled Cassandra had added two phrases to the oath she wouldn't have asked her to make. "Why?"

"Because Harry giving me this job literally saved my life. I would have rather died than marry Jasper Houghton, and someone like me doesn't have many options."

"I see. Harry's aunt is less than comfortable in the magical world. It would be helpful if you would play liaison so she didn't have to come to the magical world as often."

"I can do that."

"All right then we'll join the others once you fill these two forms out."

In the courtroom Harry was surprised that everyone except Perseus Davies and Felicia were in the room he was quick to make introductions for his Aunt. He started with the highest ranked person first. Lady Augusta may I present my aunt Petunia Dursley, Aunt Petunia the Dowager Countess of Longbottom."

Petunia was of course at least a little impressed. Lady Longbottom had an imposing demeanor that commanded respect. "Lady Longbottom. May I thank you for your interest in my nephew, I also want to thank you for inviting him to stay last Christmas."

"Your nephew Mrs. Dursley has many sterling qualities, and I dare say you have done well by your sister in your raising of him."

"Thank you Your Ladyship."

"Elder Ogden may I present my aunt Petunia Dursley. Aunt Petunia this is the Honorable Elder Tiberius Ogden."

Petunia blushed lightly when Tiberius raised her hand to his lips for a brief salute. "May I echo Gussie's compliment. You have done well by young Harry here."

As he finished his comment, the court clerk, McGonagall, Dumbledore, and the Judge filed in. Everyone sat down as the court was called to order.

"So we are here today to determine the matter of custody for one Lord Harry James Potter." The judge intoned. "His parents' wills stated that custody should first go to his godfather, who at the present is incarcerated in Azkaban Prison, then to his godmother who is in St. Mungos' Janus Thickey Ward, then to Minerva McGonagall. However instead of being placed with Professor McGonagall the boy was placed with his maternal aunt. Where he has resided until attending Hogwarts this year. Due to the irregularities in this case. A change in guardianship was filed by the boy's muggle Aunt and a magical trustee board, denying Professor McGonagall custody. Would either side like to add anything to this summation?"

Albus Dumbledore stood, "May I address the court." At the judge's nod he continued. "Mr. Potter was placed with his aunt as an infant for his protection, and the wills were not opened so Professor McGonagall had no way of knowing she was named his magical guardian."

Horace addressed the judge. "I would ask that Professor McGonagall be questioned. I object to Albus Dumbledore having any voice in these proceedings given his illegal actions in placing Lord Potter at his aunt's in the first place."

"Objection sustained. Chief Warlock no further comments from you will be allowed."

"Professor do you have objections to being questioned?"

"No." Minerva spoke. Moments later she was seated in the witness box.

"Professor prior to their deaths did the Potters at anytime indicate to you they were considering making you one of Lord Potter's guardians?"

"Lily shortly after she found out she was pregnant said, 'If things go poorly and the worst happens can we count on you?' I... When

Albus said that putting Harry with his aunt was best, I trusted he was correct. It was to protect Harry from Death Eaters running loose following the downfall of you-Know-Who and away from the pressures of fame for surviving the killing curse."

"So you felt putting Harry with his aunt was best."

"Yes."

"Did you know anything about Mrs. Dursley or her family?"

"I observed them for a day."

"You spied on them."

"Yes."

"Did you approve of what you saw?"

"Not really."

"But you left him there anyway? Did you ever check on Harry?"

"No it might have drawn unwanted attention to him."

"Were you there, when Harry was placed with his aunt?"

"Yes."

Horace got a delighted expression on his face at her last words. "So what did Mrs. Dursley say when you explained the situation to her?"

Minerva got a slightly panicked look. "Nothing."

"You told her that her sister was dead and she must now care for her nephew and she said nothing?"

"We didn't speak to her."

"That's right, you and the Chief Warlock didn't speak to her, instead you left a fifteen month old baby on the doorstep like a bottle of milk in November. Never mind he could have woken and wandered away, could have caught his death from being chilled or been attacked by

animals, or that he could have been considered an unwanted burden. How very responsible of you. No further questions.

"Your honor, Petunia Dursley was not listed in the Potter wills despite that, the Dursleys have taken good care of Harry and done their best to see he is prepared for his place in our world. He is a responsible young man and he has requested a chance to speak for himself."

Harry came forward. "Your Honor, I know in the wizarding world children have no say in where they are placed. In the muggle world however when they are my age they are allowed to voice their opinion. I wish for you to know that while my aunt and uncle are not the warmest of people, they have always seen to it that I had what I needed and that I was prepared for the life ahead of me. I feel that I can trust my aunt and my trustee board.

"Under Professor McGonagall I would worry about many things, at school she has proven to be rather biased against people from my house, and I don't trust her. I question her sudden interest in pursuing custody of me. Her attitude at school hardly conveyed a parental concern. Thank you."

"All right. Does anyone else have anything else to say."

Albus spoke again, "Your honor, as you make your decision it's important to remember that a child doesn't see all sides of an issue."

The judge scowled, she had asked that the Chief Warlock make no more comments. "I believe I have reached a decision. Minerva McGonagall your petition for custody of Lord Harry James Potter is declined. The present arrangement of his muggle aunt and a magical trustee board is acceptable. Court is adjourned."

Harry's trustee board and his aunt all smiled. Harry closed his eyes in relief, before looking up at his aunt, he felt pleased when she gave him an approving nod. Harry never noticed as McGonagall and Dumbledore left.

Felicia came in followed by Cassandra, "What did we miss?"

"Official approval." Her husband embraced her and placed a light kiss on her cheek.

"It's over already?"

"Horace was his typical brilliant self, and it only took a few minutes to demonstrate her lack of proper concern for Harry as a baby. From there Harry expressed his doubts about her now and the judge made her decision."

"So what now?"

Horace gave a wolfish grin. "Now the fun really begins."

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Albus tried to talk to Minerva as they left the courtroom. "Minerva I'm sure-"

"Be quiet Albus."

"But Minerva-"

"I said BE QUIET! I do not wish to discuss this further at this time, Albus." Minerva was taking a hard look at herself, and at the moment she didn't like what she saw.

Chapter 21 The Daily Prophet June 25,1992

Special Edition

Wizengamot Scandal Explodes

by Lyle Withers, Wizengamot Special Correspondent

The students of Hogwarts started the summer break a few days ago, unfortunately there was one student for whom this was not the start of a break. Rather it was the start of understanding just how those of us in the Wizarding world have failed one we hail as a hero. That's right dear readers, the Wizarding world has failed one of its most beloved figures. Lord Harry James Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived was in court this week.

The scandal begins with the Potter wills, according to the wills Lord Potter was not to be placed with his muggle relatives at all. Lord Potter was found by his aunt, Petunia Dursley, on her doorstep the morning of November 2, 1981 and she has had custody since that time. Albus Dumbledore was charged with four counts of misuse of powers. The counts he was found guilty of were illegal sealing of proper wills, improper placement of a magical child, temporary sealing of a magical child's power, and giving authority to to a legal firm with no authority to do so. The revered Headmaster faces a three year suspension and possible dismissal from his position of Chief Warlock and a fifty thousand galleon fine. He was also was found guilty of two misdemeanor counts of vandalism of property, one count of interfering with magical post, and three counts of abuse of muggles. Details found on page 2.

In 1980 Dumbledore appointed old time friend Elphias Doge and the law firm of Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent to look after the interests of the Potter family despite having no clear authority to do so. By this point the previous Lord Potter was exceptionally busy with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and they were living in hiding due to the threat of You-Know-Who. Then came the fateful attack. Despite instructions to look after young Harry Potter's interests it seems that all the law firm did was look after its own interests. Not counting their failure to see to it that the last wishes of the Potters were fulfilled, the firm also failed to see to getting proper permissions filed with the goblins so the Potter family wealth could be seen to and earn the interest it would have otherwise gotten.

Furthermore some evidence has come forward that they exploited the wizarding world's interest in the magical child. They also failed to see that Lord Potter's aunt got the just stipend she was entitled to, to see that he had everything he needed growing up. Mrs. Dursley said in court, "Imagine my surprise when I bring Harry to get his school things and find out there were thousands of pounds set aside for looking after him. We had to scrimp and save just so he had a few nice things and most of what he had growing up was second-hand. He did odd jobs around the neighborhood for pocket money and he helped clean the school where he studies karate to help pay for his classes." A goblin spokesman reported that the figure for the lost interest alone was in the tens of thousands of galleons. Details page 4.

The most shocking failure of all concerns all of us in the wizarding world. The Potter home in Godric's Hollow has been a memorial site for the magical world since the end of the last war. Sadly this memorial came to us all at a disgusting price. The Wizengamot took it from the Boy-Who-Lived and never reimbursed the Potter estate for its confiscation of the property. That's right readers, the Wizengamot confiscated a property of an orphan who had done nothing wrong. It confiscated the property of the boy who saved us from You-Know-Who.

Elder Tiberius Ogden and the Dowager Countess of Longbottom, who are now part of a magical board of trustees to look after Lord Potter's interests, both expressed deep dismay at the lack of concern that the actions taken by the Wizengamot of that time demonstrate. Despite both of them being seat holders in the Wizengamot, neither took part in the decision to rob Lord Potter of his property. Elder Ogden was ill with complications from wizarding flu, and Lady Longbottom was dealing with the aftermath of the attack on her son's family. But these two respected members of the community aren't sitting back and doing nothing. For details of what they're doing and an statement from the Boy-Who-Lived see page 3.

Albus Dumbledore Suspended for Misuse Of Powers

by Rita Skeeter

"At the end of the last war the wizarding world was so relieved to be out from under the threat of You-Know-Who that we didn't look to closely at the actions of those that were our leaders," Horace Ogden

said to the court in his opening statements. He was clearly understating the case.

For years the wizarding world has looked to Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore as a leader of the light, but is he really as light as he's painted? Recent revelations about him would make it seem that that answer is no. Despite his long time stance of wanting to protect muggles, he was found guilty of three counts of muggle abuse. He claims in his zeal to protect the wizarding world's savior he inadvertently broke a couple of laws on the books for the protection of muggles. But sadly those weren't the only laws he broke. He usurped the role of magical guardian and no one knew because he used his position to seal the Potter wills unread. He then failed to place the Boy-who lived in a proper wizarding environment, and furthermore failed to make adequate provision for the Boy-Who-Lived. The two counts of vandalism he was found guilty of stem from his actions of not protecting the contents remaining in the cottage following the fateful attack. The firm he appointed, made up of his cronies, instead exploited its access to young Lord Potter while at the same time failing to see to it there was adequate provision for the wizarding hero. That's right reader's despite Albus Dumbledore's assurances that our hero was being treated like a prince and was safe that isn't the truth. What other lies has he told the wizarding world? Many apparently. The two most disturbing charges the Headmaster of Hogwarts was found guilty of, were the two child endangerment charges. When placing Harry Potter with his aunt instead of doing the decent thing and informing Lily Potter's sister in person and asking if she was willing to raise our savior, the Headmaster left him on the doorstep with a letter. He ignored it was November, that the boy was capable of walking, and the danger of an animal carrying off the toddler. He had his plans for the savior of the wizarding world, and letting him know his position wasn't part of it. The second endangerment charge came into play when the Boy-Who-Lived was four, when the young savior performed a rather spectacular piece of accidental magic.(Apparently young Harry levitated and stuck his preschool teacher and three classmates to the ceiling for interrupting him in his play.) Anxious to protect him from notice, the Headmaster put a bind on his magic. He assured the court that the bind was temporary in nature and was gone by the time the savior was eleven. Such bindings of that nature are a class two offense against children and are punishable by a twenty thousand galleon fine. This reporter had to research why this was so because apparently laws against this have been on the books so

long it is just generally considered taboo. The Healers at St. Mungo's gave me my answer. Bindings on the cores of young children have been opposed by Healers unless their magic is likely to result in life threatening situations, for example very powerful fire magic because it results in one of two things: 98% of cases fractures in the core or the other 2% where it acts like a resistance for the magic to work against making it unusually strong. In either case no one but a trained healer should set such bindings. What was Dumbledore reason for ignoring this law? Was it to protect our hero as he claims, or was it to prevent the boy from ever growing strong enough to challenge the Headmaster's standing?

His standing is most definitely in trouble. About a quarter of the Wizengamot called for his immediate resignation from that august body. Cooler heads prevailed. The Chief Warlock is facing a three year suspension without pay, and a fifty thousand galleon fine two thirds of which is reimbursement to his victims for their pain and suffering. His position on his return to the Wizengamot is still under debate. Several people have voiced concerns about the advisability of leaving him in the headmaster position, given it is of such influence over children. In the end it was decided the circumstances surrounding his misconduct were extraordinary therefore he would be allowed to still be Headmaster.

Lucius Malfoy, an influential member of the Hogwarts Board of Governors, did comment that the board would be watching the Headmaster's conduct very closely to protect the children of the wizarding world.

Boy-Who-Lived Gives Statement

by Calliope Mac Donald

After numerous attempts by reporters to speak to Lord Potter, he gave a brief statement to the press. He appeared with both his trustees and his aunt and seemed a little nervous as he read the following aloud.

Ladies and gentlemen of the wizarding world, it is an honor to address you. I know you all have known about me my whole life. I want to start by apologizing for those that lied about me and took advantage of your admiration. I also want to acknowledge all of you who wrote to me or sent me gifts. I haven't actually received them

due to the mail wards the Headmaster put up around my aunt's home. The last year has been full of changes for me: finding out I was magical, finding out my parents left me things, finding out I was famous, going to Hogwarts, finding new friends, finding out how both wonderful and flawed the wizarding world can be. I've met many wonderful people Lady Longbottom, her grandson Neville, the Corners, the Ogdens, the Davies, Barchok at Gringotts. I've also met many people who are flawed. The most common flaw I've found since joining the wizarding world is prejudice. I am the first Potter in Slytherin since the first Baron who was given the title because of service to the king with Godric Gryffindor. I don't get why my sorting caused so much fuss because what kind of person you are is more important than where you are sorted.

I spent much of this year figuring out who I want to be in this new world. Unfortunately my last four days has been spent trying to see that those who would try to hurt or use me would be unable to do so. In that process some corruption has been exposed. It is up to us as a people to be vigilant against evil in our midst. To keep our eyes open and see what is, versus what we wish to see. Muggles have a saying the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I believe that I owe the wizarding world my voice, and I intend to use it to try and make it a better place. I ask that everyone look beyond intention, and look at actions.

I realize that to many of you I am a hero. I would ask you to remember that I am also human. I have flaws just ask my Aunt or Lady Augusta or Neville. I ask that you respect my privacy and remember that I'm a kid I make mistakes. I am honored by the respect you give me, although I believe it would be better placed on my parents, because I believe that they did something all those years ago, not me. I do not belittle the appreciation that their sacrifice has wrought, and I would like to thank those of you in the wizarding world who have expressed your love and appreciation for their sacrifice.

I am going home to enjoy what summer break I have left and I'll return to the wizarding world in the autumn. thank you and good day to you all.

After he finished speaking, he left. Lady Augusta Longbottom and Felicia Corner both fielded questions from the press, answering general questions about Lord Potter's pre-Hogwarts education, his

feelings about the legal wrangling, and the controversy over his sorting. In a statement of her own Lady Longbottom informed the press that Tiberius Ogden would have the responsibility of voting the Potter seat until Harry comes of age. Also that Lord Potter's trustees would be seeking reimbursement from the ministry for the Potter Property and that she was disappointed that further sanctions on the Chief Warlock were not made.

Legal Firm in Legal Morass

by Jared Ambercrombie

The law firm of Marchbanks, Doge, Diggle and Trent is in need of legal aid of its own today. The lawsuits that were filed against them last September were finally heard in court and the fallout has been spectacular. It was discovered that despite being told to look after the interests of the Potter family the only ones the once dominant legal firm looked after was themselves. The primary lawsuit is a ruinous one because M,D,D,&T failed to see to two basic financial aspects that amounted to tens of thousands of galleons. The suit brought by Lord Potter his trustees and Gringott's bank is for the lost interest and for the funds that his guardian could have used caring for the Boy-Who-Lived. The fund for the care were set aside per the will of the last Lord Potter but due to an oversight were never disbursed to Harry' Potter's guardian and Aunt. In the course of the trial it came out that the pictures of our hero that have appeared over the years since he left the magical world were sold to the various papers by none other than Dedalus Diggle who rather than banking the moneys for Lord Potter placed the funds in his own account. Other issues in the lawsuit include that the law firm did nothing to stop the less than true stories that were published or to stop the use of Lord Potter's name for the promotion of products. It was revealed that the law firm did indeed take a percentage of most of those money making schemes but had not gotten authorization to do so by either Lord Potter or his legal guardian.

The firm solicitors are now facing disbarment and fines that will leave them without a knut.

Obituaries

Quirinus Quirrell, age 34. the former defense against Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts, was found dead in a flat off Diagon Alley after

the landlord noticed an odd smell coming from the flat. Investigators found several vials of an unidentified potion. But when tested on an animal the potion's effects though deadly didn't match the damage to the body. The body appeared to have at some point in the previous two months have ingested unicorn blood and showed signs of massive pre-death decomposition. Investigation continues but investigators are not hopeful.

A/N: Yes I know I cheated, but this way you all get the fallout without having to read the drawn out objection, objection overruled, or objection sustained which would take forever to write. As first year comes to a close I'm announcing a one month hiatus. I like updating frequently but I don't have many chapters done of second year yet. So I'm going to take a break from posting on this story. I'll resume posting when I have ten to fifteen chapters built up. Until then happy reading.

Chapter 22 Summer '92 part 1

Harry entered the house at number 4 Privet Drive, exhausted. The last four days had been wearying. Harry understood the venial nature of man in general but four days of having it rubbed in your face was annoying. He was sort of surprised when Dudley half tackled him. "Whaaatt? Oh it's you."

"Yo cuz. How ya doing?"

"I'm fine. What's with the gangster rap?"

"My roommate at Smeltings, he uses it all the time. He's cool."

"So how did you do? Were you worried for nothing?"

"Nineteenth out of a hundred and five. I joined study groups for two classes but I did fine. How about you?"

"Tied for second out of thirty eight."

"Cool what are your plans this summer?"

"Haven't a clue. I mean there's chores, and kenpo...But I want to do some studying ahead and do some research into my family stuff. Speaking of that thanks so much for that heraldry book it was great."

"That's cool, and thanks so much for those boxing tickets. Dad came and got me, my roommate and one of my friends from the gym and we went. It was so great. I already did my summer schoolwork so I'll give you a hand with the chores It finally occurred to me I need to learn that crap, so I'll know it when I go out on my own, school was a real eye-opener."

Aunt Petunia called them and the four of them sat down to a meal of Indian takeaway. While they ate the rice, vegetable koorma, lamb masala, kofta masala, chicken biriyani, raita, mango chutney, lime pickle, and garlic naan with mango kulfi for dessert, Dudley answered his Mum's question about his school year. Harry helped put the leftovers away then it was Harry's turn. Harry gave an edited version but by the end Petunia was pale and angry looking.

Petunia finally asked in a pinched voice, "Do you want to go back, or shall we look into a new school?"

"I don't know." Part of Harry feared going back, but Hogwarts was also where he had friends.

"Fine head to bed, we'll plan the summer in the morning. Goodnight Harry." Petunia gave Dudley a kiss on the cheek. "Goodnight Dudley."

"Night Mum, Dad."

"Goodnight, Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia." Both boys shuffled out of the dining room and up the stairs.

"That's wrong, the way they treat him." Uncle Vernon said. "Is another school even possible? They want control over him."

"I'll write Felicia in the morning and let her know what Harry told us. She knows the magical world, maybe she'll have some ideas."

The next morning Harry woke early, cleaned up, and after collecting a couple things from his trunk he went downstairs to start breakfast. Thirty minutes later his family came down and joined him, surprised to find a gift at each of their places. Dudley, never one to be shy when it came to gifts, tore the wrapping off. He grinned to see it was a book about the British Army Cadets. In one of his letters to Harry, he had talked about seeing some cadets at Smeltings and how it looked interesting and he hoped to join next year.

Vernon's was larger. He tore the wrapping paper off to see a portrait of himself, Petunia, and Dudley. "Paint this, did you?" At Harry's nod, he said, "Nicely done. Maybe you have a future as an artist," he paused and looked to Petunia before adding, "but I think you left someone out."

Harry's eyes got very bright for a moment and he looked down. "Maybe I'll do another later. I'm glad you like it, I couldn't think of what to do for your birthday so I did that."

Petunia eyed the wooden box at her place, she recognized it because she had helped her father pick it out for Lily's sixteenth birthday. Tears filled her eyes.

Harry noticed. "Aunt Petunia? I found it when Dumbledore took me to Godric's Hollow during break. While we were in court I had Cassandra take it to the goblins. They cleaned and appraised all of what was there, then removed the Potter pieces. I added a pair of earrings but Mum did want you to have it."

Petunia reverently opened the jewelry box. Inside was a cloth bag. "Grandmama's pearls. I was so jealous when Grandmama gave them to Lily. She gave me her emerald brooch and the emerald and diamond earrings but I still envied your mother the pearls. Mama's locket. But what are these?" She pulled another small bag open inside was a necklace made of amethysts and emeralds looking like a daisy chain of brilliant sparkling lily flowers with small diamonds as center stones. "Oh my word." Also in the box was a jade bead necklace and an 10 ct. emerald pendant.

Harry looked at his Aunt; he wondered why she didn't get contacts instead of wearing glasses, because she too had the Evans eyes although hers lacked the extra sparkle that came of being magical. Then she came to the earrings box. She opened it and found a simple tasteful pearl drop earring with a half carat diamond stud. "Thank you Harry. Well now that we've opened all the overdue birthday gifts how about we eat breakfast before it gets cold."

Harry yelled "The bacon!"

After breakfast Vernon headed to work, and Petunia and the boys figured out their plan for the summer: outlining chores, activities, the planned trip to the seaside, and tentative plans of when they would do back to school shopping. Harry included a twice weekly times to be in the magical world to handle things in his plans, starting in a couple weeks.

Later Harry went to the dojo.

"Harry, it's good to see you. Did you just get back?"

"Hai, Sensei. I'm back and I'll be around the rest the summer except for the first week in August when we go to the beach."

"Great, do you want your old job back?"

"Actually we found out due to a series of legal mix-ups my guardians never got the money they were supposed to get to take care of me. So I don't need a job, but I do want to spend most my time here. I've really missed you and this place."

"How was school in Scotland?"

"Interesting. I'm still trying to decide if I want to go back."

"That doesn't sound good." There was a look of deep concern on his face. "Want to talk about it?"

Harry grinned. "Not really, what class comes in next?"

"Beginners six to eight."

"I'll go change." After the class Harry sparred with his teacher who was pleased that despite the long months away Harry's skills had stayed pretty sharp.

"You're almost ready for your next belt test. Give you three to four weeks to smooth out a few patches and brush the dust off and you'll be ready."

"That would be fabulous. Is there room in the age ten to twelve beginner class Friday? A friend of mine from school was interested."

"Hai, I've got room enough for three more."

"I'll let him know."

That evening he wrote a letter to Neville, then decided he should let Flamel know what happened, so he penned a second letter. He then pulled out the Godric's Hollow journals.

There were nine in all, only two in his father's hand. One appeared to go back to his Hogwarts days: it talked of the magic he was learning outside the classroom. Harry was surprised to learn his father had been an animagus. His form had been a stag. Suddenly him calling Harry Bambi and his own nickname of Prongs, made sense. Harry found the notes fascinating and resolved to become an animagus himself. As he read through the notes he noted what he would need to learn before he could even begin. Most the notes in

the journal were for pranks most of which made Harry chuckle as he imagined the consequences. He looked up hours later, and realized he had stayed up far later than normal and said a soft curse under his breath, he hated doing that.

Over the next week Harry found out from his father's other journal that the Potter family had been famous for defensive magic and warding for centuries. James had been kicking himself in them for ignoring his father's instructions to study the family grimoire and magics because he could have been doing so much more to protect the family if only he'd have listened when he was younger.

His mother's journals were long intricate details of things she was experimenting with and results of research. If Harry hadn't already heard his mother was a genius, reading her journals would have convinced him. Two were about potions and how she was experimenting to combine knowledge of muggle chemistry with them. They also included notes how this potion combined with that spell and a muggle compound could be used to create a devastating weapon, magnifying the effects of the spell fiftyfold. It was near this she noted: "The Headmaster has discouraged my developing this further. He says we must be above such things or we are no better than what we fight." One was about charms. There were three that seemed to combine arithmancy, runes as well as charms to create what his mother called technomancy. Harry had had just enough physics in school to recognize that some of his mother's equations as containing segments of physics. The last was about warding which included information about warding from the Potter family grimoire. Towards the end was a section on blood magic. Lily had noted that yes blood magic was dark in classification by the ministry but her research had found not all blood magic actually was dark, what made the difference was when the blood was knowingly and willingly shed.

Because of this and the information the goblins had given his Aunt about the wards, he now understood the wards directly around the property he and his family resided in much better. Close to the house they made magic like apparition and port-keys nearly impossible, unless keyed to the wards. Further out the secondary wards which guarded him from those of ill intent extended beyond the house in all directions for a four mile radius thereby including most places Harry needed or wanted to go on a regular basis. When Harry or his family was further away than that the wards left

something akin to a notice-me-not spell about them. The wards were keyed around the blood relationship between Harry and his aunt, and they included some fairly dark wards, wards based on blood not willingly shed. Harry wondered if he had been the source of the blood. It wouldn't have been hard. The Headmaster wouldn't have even needed to hurt him, merely collected the copious amounts of blood from the wound on Harry's own forehead. All that would have been needed after that would have been a blood replenishment potion and Harry would be fine with no one else the wiser.

A week later Harry was growing worried. He hadn't heard from Neville, actually he and Aunt Petunia hadn't heard from anyone. Thankfully Petunia had given him permission to go to Potter Place because Cassandra called the previous night saying she urgently needed his input on the manse, and he wanted to floo Neville while he was there. He hoped Neville didn't get into a ton of trouble from what happened at school but looking back it was another case of speaking the truth far more rudely than needed be done. Harry fully expected a lecture from Lady Augusta to that effect. When he arrived at Potter Place he found Cassandra had used the lift key he'd given her and with the elves' help had made a small office to work from. She was annoyed with him. "Why did you ignore my owls and the owls of the trustees? They've been trying to get hold of you for a week. Thank heaven your aunt showed me how to use the phone or I'd still be waiting."

"I didn't get any owls! Neither did Aunt Petunia. I've been waiting for responses to the ones I sent did you get them?"

"Yes, which was why I got so frustrated with not hearing back."

"I wonder what happened to them."

"Well right now you have more urgent things to deal with. Lady Longbottom wants you to floo there ASAP. I floored her last night after I talked to you and Mrs. Dursley. She's expecting you. When you get back I want to go over the old architectural plans for the rebuild of the manse, to see if you want any changes before finding an architect and contractors. But this can wait, get going. Lady Longbottom won't appreciate being kept waiting."

Harry with a feeling of trepidation did as he was told. At the Longbottoms he was met by an elf that directed him to Lady

Augusta's sitting room. He entered the small room and was about to greet Lady Augusta when she started.

"So you ignored my owl, the owls of all your trustees, and-"

"I didn't get any owls." Harry protested earnestly.

Augusta looked at him evaluating his truthfulness. "Fine, I still have several issues with you. Why in heaven's name didn't you inform any of us about what was going on at Hogwarts?"

"Referring to?"

"The forbidden corridor. Your foray into the Forbidden Forest with only that idiot Hagrid as an escort. The discussion in Dumbledore's office. You have a trustee board for a reason, Harry."

"Dumbledore runs Hogwarts like it's his personal fiefdom, and we tried to request you be called for the discussion in his office the professors ignored us."

"I see." After a long moment during which she seemed to mull things over, Augusta went to the fireplace and scooped a bit of floo powder from its container. "William Tofty."

"Augusta, what a pleasure I haven't heard from you since your delightful ball."

"William, I have some concerns I wish for the Hogwarts Board of Governors to look into. I have had conversations with both my grandson and Lord Potter. I'm one of his trustees and the stories that he and my grandson have told me of their year at Hogwarts have raised several concerns. Concerns that I feel would best be addressed by the Board. Perhaps all of you could come to tea next week and we could discuss it."

"That sounds delightful. I shall tell the others to expect your invitation."

"Thank you I look forward to next week."

Lady Augusta turned back to Harry. "Now Harry, I want you to write down a full breakdown of how the other students treated you, how the teachers treated you, and how the headmaster treated you.

I want you to write down every point given and every point lost. Everything. And you will be here at next week's tea. Understood?

After he nodded she continued. "Now, Neville has asked to go to your karate school. Is that possible?"

Harry spent the next three hours fulfilling Lady Longbottom's requests. He then portkeyed back to Potter Place exhausted. Cassandra took a bit of pity on him and explained the old architect's plans. Harry thought carefully about things and could half picture a couple of changes but couldn't describe them very well. Cassandra decided that she would book a room at the Leaky Cauldron on Monday in two weeks and that she would get the architects of good reputation there so Harry could pick his own choice of architects.

Tea with the board of governors wound up being a non-event from Harry's perspective because the Board of Governors basically asked him and Neville to verify that their accounts of the school year were true and then dismissed them from the room. Leaving Harry in the dark about what would happen, much to his frustration.

The the rest of June and the most of July was odd because Harry got no owls, not even from Gringott's. Thankfully he had an alternate point of contact in Cassansra. Petunia was relieved she no longer had to escort Harry when he went to the magical world, although she made a point of coming with Harry when he met with his trustees. Harry saw Neville at least twice a week. Once when Neville came to karate class, after karate class the two boys usually went to a nearby tea shop for tea, sandwiches,(cucumber for Harry, chicken salad for Neville) and scones and they would talk about what all they were doing on their days apart. The second was when Harry came to the magical world to deal with matters of business and his trustees took turns taking him around, when he usually met Neville in passing at Gringott's.

"Gran has me learning family magics. It's kinda hard, but between the portraits and the family grimoire I am doing decently at it."

"I wonder how I'll learn the Potters' family magics?"

"From the family grimoire."

"Then I wonder why my grandparents died. I found out from Dad's journal he didn't start even trying to learn the family magics until he and Mum went into hiding and Mum was learning them faster than him."

"Well it's only gossip that I heard from Great Aunt Enid and Cousin Callidora during the ball, but what I heard was that Charlus Potter had something wrong with his magic, something wasn't right about it. That's why he married a Black. Dorea Black had actually moved abroad. Rumor had it she hated her family. It wasn't until after he became Lord Potter that he found a bride. Maybe if you talk to your ancestral portraits you could find out more."

"I'll do that. But only a few will actually talk with me."

"What? Why?"

"I got sorted into Slytherin. The first Baron thinks it's fabulous. But most the rest seem to feel I've let down the family honor by not being a Gryffindor. If it weren't for Mum's letter I think I would feel like I committed an unforgivable crime by being who and what I am."

"That sucks. At least they can't stop you from learning the family magics."

"How's your homework coming?"

"Good. I finished the last of it yesterday."

"That's good. Sensei said I did a good job teaching you. He thinks you'll be ready for your first belt test by summer's end."

"Really?"

"That's what he said. I've got mine next week."

"That's cool. I wish Hogwarts offered classes to help people be fit."

"I just wish they had a blooming gym."

"Maybe they do but it's in an unused part of the castle."

"Hmm. I guess we'll have to check those. I mean there's nothing on the map but Dad and his friends were purebloods. Well that can wait till we're back at school, assuming I don't change schools. I gotta go, my class starts in ten. See you next week."

Harry got home and was surprised to see Cassandra and Felicia Corner there talking with his aunt. Vernon and he had arrived at just the same time. Harry helped his uncle with the takeaway bags. Although it made for a crowded table they all sat and shared the Chinese food.

"Okay, Cassandra tell us what you found out about schools." Felicia started.

Cassandra finished chewing and swallowed her mouthful. "Well as pathetic as it is Hogwarts is really the best all-around school in the British and Irish Isles. There are other schools seven of them in fact. They're all day schools and none of them offer as many subjects. One offers just charms and potions, one just transfiguration, the others aren't any better: divination, rituals, and two that teach just charms. Technically to take his seat in the Wizengamot Harry has to have six OWLs, the other schools won't do. Abroad options are somewhat limited. Beauxbatons Harry would have to be extremely fluent in French, to my knowledge he isn't. Also Beauxbatons is fairly restrictive for it's male population, since girls outnumber boys three to one and good share of the girls have a bit of Veela blood."

On seeing looks of blank incomprehension, she quickly continued. "Veela are a magical creature that have extreme sex appeal. They can interbreed with wizards making the children more powerful. Many of the older pureblood families don't mind if their children marry someone with some creature blood it reduces the chances for squibs like me. Needless to say the families tend to be pretty protective of the girls there.

"Elsewhere in Europe is Durmstrang, it is the only school in Europe that teaches not just Defense but also the Dark Arts themselves and again Harry would need to speak a foreign language. There are day schools equivalent to the ones here in the United Kingdom elsewhere. The biggest issues for Harry are the need for multiple OWLs and the language barriers. Further away in the US is Salem

which is an all girls school and in Montana the Absaroke School, and the all boys Pendragon school in the Mojave all of which start schooling at eight not eleven. The remaining schools in the US are day schools. Australia is a non-starter because the magical community there is isolationistic and they don't accept students from abroad. Canada like the US begins schooling earlier. Anywhere else language barriers exist."

"This su-eats dirt." Harry said changing what he was about to say mid word he had no desire to incur his aunt's wrath and saying something sucked. Even if it did was a sure-fire way to get his mouth washed out. "So I'm stuck at Hogwarts."

"Fraid so kiddo." Felicia said. "If it's any consolation Lady Longbottom is keeping after the Board of Governors for changes. Dumbledore is going to find himself on a mighty short leash."

Chapter 23 Summer '92 Part 2

Albus was furious. The Board of Governors had called him to this meeting; he had things to do damnit. Didn't they understand he needed a free hand to mold the boy who would save them all. He was fighting an uphill battle on that front already because the boy was a Slytherin.

"Albus, I realize it can be difficult to get qualified teachers but only twenty percent of the defense students got higher than an acceptable on their DADA OWLs. Now your teacher is found dead in mysterious circumstances in Diagon Alley. Who do you intend to hire to fill the post this year?" Hildegard Benton asked.

"I'm not sure. I have solicited a number of people to try and fill the post."

"Very well on that topic we'll consider the matter closed." William Tofty said. "Next is the issue of unequal treatment and bias based on house. There is a massive amount of evidence this time Albus, from members of multiple houses. This can no longer be ignored or pushed aside as you have done in the past. I realize the house system has been in place for centuries, but Albus the inequality and house prejudice that was documented over the past year demands reform. If only in the form of limiting the points that may be taken by one teacher in one class period from one student without being subject to a peer review. Also a standardization of points given, could very well be in order. Favoritism isn't something we want to encourage Albus. It discourages students and diminishes the validity of the house system."

"I have the utmost trust in the professors here."

"Yet there is a clearly documented case where your deputy, transfiguration teacher, and head of Gryffindor awarded a Gryffindor five points for being the first to do a spell but when faced with a Slytherin Hufflepuff class she awards a mere two points to the Slytherin who accomplished the same task." Lucius Malfoy drawled. "Sounds like house prejudice to me."

"I will speak to the teachers."

"Insufficient." Lillian Withers spoke firmly. "This is not a suggestion Albus, you and your staff will have a set code of behavior that you'll abide by just as the students do."

"Don't think that we don't know about you bringing a dangerous artifact into the school this last year." Ezekiel Mac Donnegan stated. "For that alone, we should replace you."

"And let us not fail to mention your sending students to the Slytherin common room in the dungeons despite the fact the troll last Halloween was reported in that location. One would think headmaster you held no concern for a quarter of your students. And wasn't a student hurt on that occasion?" Lucius heaped even more fuel onto the ire of the Board of Governors.

Hannah Jespersen said, " Albus I have known you for seventy years. I know you are a good person and have only the best of intentions. But even I have to question the wisdom of bringing a dangerous and attractive to shall we say, baser valued people, into a school full of children. You are getting older perhaps it is time for you to slow down even more, maybe rethink and reevaluate your priorities, have more rest and not spread yourself quite so thinly. I know that you won't be having Wizengamot duties take advantage of it. Take a vacation."

Albus grimaced usually he could talk the board around to his way of thinking- Hannah, Hildegard, and William being old friends of his. Lillian had always been about what was best for the children, but Lucius and Ezekiel had bought their way onto the board and were an ever present thorn in his side. Perhaps he had gone a bit too far this last year. "Very well, I shall get with Minerva and discuss the situation, I shall have a code for the teachers by our annual meeting in August. I hope that is acceptable?"

The faces of those he considered friends on the board relaxed and smiled at him. Lillian merely nodded. Lucius and Ezekiel both got calculating expressions.

Ezekiel spoke first. "That will be acceptable, but Albus know that the Board of Governors will be watching you much more closely these next few years. If you fail to protect your students again, I will have no qualms recommending the Board replace you."

"I understand."

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Horace waited for his Uncle Tiberius. "Uncle, I was hoping I could talk to you. Could you join me for tea at my office. I have some of those brownies you love so much." He glanced nervously around. He really didn't want to speak of this here in the ministry you never knew who might be listening.

"Of course Horace, give me one moment. Colin, I realize that the reform on the muggle baiting and abuse laws is not popular, but as the recent case against the former Chief Warlock shows the consequences aren't severe enough to serve as a true deterrent, therefore reform is necessary. I'll see you when we reconvene tomorrow. Now Horace, what was it you wanted to speak to me about?"

"Not here at my office."

Five minutes later they sat comfortably in his office and were joined by Perseus and Stephen. Horace spoke first. "Uncle, what would you say if I said there was a man in Azkaban who had never had a trial and that he had been there for ten years."

"I would say that's a gross offense on the part of the ministry. Has that truly happened?"

Perseus spoke, "I was trying to fulfill one of Harry's requests. I attempted to get a trial transcript of his godfather's trial, but no transcript exists because he was never tried. He was signed into Azkaban on Bartemius Crouch's orders but I suspect given that he was Harry's guardian in the wills that there is more than meets the eye here. I'm not a defense attorney – none of us are- but a miscarriage of justice like this offends my sensibilities."

Tiberius finished the pecan brownie he had chosen to go with his tea. Then stood and paced for a moment. "Jamieson Fawcett. He's probably the best defense attorney in the British Isles. He'll know who to speak to-"

"Uncle we're afraid to do anything for fear of the powers that be simply silencing the problem."

"I can understand that, but like I said Jamieson Fawcett will be the best one to speak to."

"All right, thank you Tiberius for the recommendation." Stephen said.

"I'm sorry I couldn't be more helpful. Thank you for the tea. Unless there's any updates on what happened with the wards around Harry?"

"It's not clear why the mail wards around Harry aren't functioning properly. The goblins say it's Dumbledore, he says it's them. For now anything you want Harry to know send to Cassandra, the assistant he hired, she'll see he knows about it."

"All right, well have a good evening." Then he left.

Stephen stepped to the floo. "Law offices of Fawcett, Fawcett, and Bigglelow."

"May I help you?" The receptionist said.

"I would like an appointment with Jamieson Fawcett."

"Mr. Fawcett is on vacation until the end of August. I could make you an appointment for August 27th at ten."

"Is that the first available?"

"Yes sir."

"Fine, Stephen Corner."

"We'll see you that day then."

Stephen pulled back from the floo. "What kind of solicitor takes two months off?"

Perseus smirked. "The kind that is good enough to pick and choose his cases and clients. We're not there yet, but we'll get there. Fawcett had a leg up: his father built their reputation on defending

Death Eaters at the end of the last war. Not that we would compromise ourselves that way, but you know what I mean."

Horace spoke, "Speaking of time off when are you taking time this summer Stephen?"

"The last week in July, we're spending a week in Italy with Felicia's family."

"How goes the search for Remus Lupin?"

"Slowly. We've managed to narrow it down to a region in the French Alps or Ireland. I've dispatched a couple of the interns to see if they can find him. They're enjoying getting a paid for semi-vacation."

"It's a good thing the Potter coffers are deep."

"Yes the sad part or perhaps it's the good part, even with all the hours we've put in the goblins have been making enough interest that the bills still haven't exceeded the interest."

"I wonder." Stephen mused.

"What?" his partners asked.

"Well if what we half suspect is true, then I wonder if Black will be bringing his business to our firm as well after we free him."

"That could have its advantages. That's assuming of course, that he is innocent." Perseus said.

"Indeed." Horace agreed.

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Casssandra sighed. She was amazed at how much work there actually was for her to do and she hadn't even started working on the backlog of Harry's fan mail. Dumbledore had set aside a room at Hogwarts where all Harry's mail was redirected. She really wondered what had happened to Harry's more recent mail. It meant more work for her but between Harry's regular trips and the telephone it wasn't a big deal. They had contracted with a muggleborn architect, Ted Tonks, to finish the manse. Most of the changes Harry had the

architect make had the effect of making the manse less formal and more comfortable, Harry had moved the dining room closer to the kitchen and enlarged the kitchen. He had also included what he called house elf quarters and a attached flat for her. Listening to Harry describe the changes he wanted to the plans, she had found herself creating lists of what was needed and finding sources in both the magical and the muggle world for cabinets, fixtures and furnishings.

Cassandra felt the telephone was a marvelous thing. It beat everything the wizards had for communication hands down. Floo was face-to-face but uncomfortable and awkward as you stuck your head in the fire. Communication mirrors were limited because they connected with one other mirror. Speaking of mirrors may be she should get a set for herself and Harry before school started. She was having a fabulous time learning all about the muggle world. In addition to learning to cook, something she had been hard-pressed to do in the magical world due to the poor quality of her charms work, she found a certain satisfaction to learning the muggle way of keeping house. Harry had also suggested she investigate theater. She had gone to her first movie and found the entire experience thrilling.

How Cassandra saw house elves that was another area of changes. The Potter elves were probably the best dressed and the best treated in the magical world. Harry hadn't liked the tea towel togas and pillowcases that were the norm. Harry had taken his philosophy of adapting the expected and making it his own. The Potter elves each had three daily uniforms and one crested one for parties. The female elves had a version of a pillowcase that was more like a cross between a dress and a kimono. The males had leggings, a tunic, and a haori made from tea towels. Both sexes had leather shoes that resembled slippers with the groundskeeper elf and the handyman elf actually having half boots. The six elves that were at Hogwarts had agreed to stay and be spies for Harry but even they had their Potter elf uniforms. Harry had stilled the elves' protests by saying they were not clothes they were a uniform and if the elf didn't wear it and represent the Potters the way he wanted, he could always give them actual clothes. They instantly subsided.

The elves learned that Harry wanted them to appear clean and well cared for at all times. They also learned that Harry didn't like waste. He demanded that they only prepare as much food for a meal as

was going to be eaten; they were never to go hungry but no food was to be wasted. Zinnia had a hard time with that order at first, but gradually she learned how to fix the right amount the few meals that Harry ate in the magical world. Not that much food ever went to waste magic being what it was. Cassandra did most of her work in the office she created in Potter Place but found herself in the position of working a lot with the very independent Potter elves, in addition to working with Felicia Corner and Petunia Dursley.

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Remus Lupin heard from his neighbor that strangers were asking about him in the village. He debated the wisdom of allowing them to find him but decided it would be better to retreat to Black's Folly in the Hebrides. Thankfully Sirius had long ago given him a port-key to the uninhabited isle. It had been a saving grace many a full moon when he hadn't had funds for Wolfsbane or a secure location for him to change. He hated to go there since Sirius' betrayal, but he really had no other place to go where he wouldn't be a danger to others.

Remus was very skittish of others since he had lost his pack that long ago Halloween. He didn't trust anyone except Headmaster Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall and Poppy Pomfrey. They were the only ones he trusted not to hurt him because they knew his secret and hadn't betrayed him.

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Nicholas Flammel read the letter from young Mr. Potter. He shook his head. Would his old pupil never learn? It appeared not. Nicholas and Perenelle had learned before the end of their first century that control was at best an illusion because the only thing that they had control over was themselves. It appeared that Albus was still fascinated/obsessed with trying to control everything. Nicholas wondered how many lives Albus would damage or even destroy by manipulating people, trying to create his greater good.

He decided to think for a while before writing young Harry back, after all haste usually made for mistakes.

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Harry stepped into the Atrium at the Ministry with an outward calmness he didn't feel. After his wand was weighed he was directed to the Reception area for the Department of Mysteries.

"May I help you?" the reception witch said in a nasally voice without even looking up.

"Yes, I'm here to listen to a prophecy about me."

She didn't know why anyone would bother. It was a big expense for something so subjective anyway. Most people never bothered. "Fifty galleons please. Hold on a sec." She took the money, and fished out a form from the drawer beside her, her gaze leaving her book only long enough to verify the amount of money was correct and the form was the correct one. "Fill this out, put a drop of blood in the box to verify your identity and put it in that slot. Then you go through the blue door it will take you to a viewing room. Someone will come and take you to collect it from the shelves. "

" Sure. Thank you."

"Whatever."

Chapter 24 Summer '92 Part 3

Harry, after a few things got sorted out, had started spending time in the family vault reading the family grimoire for two hours a week followed by talking to his family portraits back at Potter Place. Most still wouldn't talk to him the main exceptions being the first Baron, the four greats grandfather who had been a Ravenclaw instead of a Gryffindor and oddly his Great-grandfather. It was from his Great-grandfather who had been in his portrait at the ministry during Harry's first visits that he found out why his grandfather had been unable to protect the manse.

"Charlus was absurdly powerful as a baby. He did accidental magic as easily as breathing. He had an absolute fascination with fire at three. He set the manse on fire one night. Fire suppression charms kept it from burning the house down, but Charlus had to be treated for burns and smoke inhalation. It was decided by me and my wife with my father's approval that we would bind his magic until he was older. So we did, but it wound up being a bad thing. As a baby it was predicted he would be a grand sorcerer, but due to the fracture of his magic that happened when his magic was bound he was only an average wizard, he wasn't even strong enough to work the more mid-level family magics. His dream of being an auror crushed, he mostly withdrew from wizarding life. He focused on building the Potter family fortune, something he did very well. He married Dorea Black when he was thirty, and it was eighteen years before James was born. Charlus pinned his hopes and dreams on James.

"It is sad when a parent pushes their dreams on their child rather than letting them find their own. But Charlus always did feel inadequate. I don't know if James was more of a hellion because he was spoiled, or if it was because it was his way of rebelling against the pressure his father put on him. I suspect if it weren't for the war and his father, James would have become a professional quidditch player rather than an auror. Charlus cared a great deal for James and was a kind and loving person in general but he was human and made mistakes as we all do."

Two days before Harry's birthday Harry found out what had been happening to his mail. His Aunt had given him permission to spend his birthday with Neville under Cassandra's supervision. Excited he sent a message to Neville and told Hedwig to wait for a reply.

When she came back she brought with her a house elf. As house elves went this one was a pretty pathetic specimen. He wore a dirty stained pillowcase, he showed signs of abuse and he was frantic to get the letter Hedwig carried away from her. Harry had suspected she was a snow phoenix but having her suddenly appear in his room in a swirl of snow toting both a letter and this strange elf clinched it.

The little elf was screeching, "Pretty owl must give Dobby letter, so Harry Potter won't go back to Hogwarts! Owwie! Owwie! Meanie Owl!"

Hedwig was actively buffeting him with her strong wings and had a good grip on him with her talons, as well as hissing at him between pecks.

"What do you think you are doing?"

The elf, who Harry noticed looked a little frostbitten and as if Hedwig had been very generous in her use of her talons and beak, cringed. It tried to pop out only to reappear in another swirl of snow. Harry was amazed by the snow in July, but rapidly came to his familiar's assistance grabbing the elf. "Who are you and what are you trying to do with my owl and WITH MY MAIL?"

* "Dobby sir. Just Dobby. Dobby the house-elf. Harry Potter sir must not go back to Hogwarts!Owwie!" He cried out as Hedwig pecked him again.

"Why not?" Harry hissed menacingly.

"There is a plot, Harry Potter. A plot to make most terrible things happen at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry this year. Dobby has known it for months, sir. Harry Potter must not put himself in peril. He is too important, sir!"

"What terrible things?"said Harry at once. "Who's plotting them?"

Harry watched astonished as Dobby proceeded to try and bash his brains out against the wall. He pulled him sharply away. "What are you doing?"

"Dobby has to punish himself sir. Dobby almost spoke master's secrets."

"So your master is behind the plot." Harry said, "Give me my mail and consider me warned."

"Harry Potter sir will not go back to Hogwarts?'"

"Whether I do or not is none of your business. Libby."

"Yes Master." She said as she popped into the room.

"This pathetic excuse for a house elf did me the service of warning me of danger this coming year at Hogwarts. However, he's also been a annoying little thief and taken my mail. I don't know the house-elf protocols for such things, apparently his family treats him quite poorly. Get my mail from him, then do whatever is appropriate."

The older elf nodded and grasped Dobby's ear the way an adult might an erring child's. "Give my master his mail."

The elf didn't immediately do as ordered so she twisted the ear harshly.

He immediately yelped, reached into his filthy pillowcase, and pulled a stack of letters out and handed them to Harry.

She then popped out, taking the errant elf with her.

Harry frowned as he looked at the stack of letters. He went through them. Most were pertaining to things he'd already dealt with. But there were three from Aaron, as well as a couple from the other members of his study group including one that was an apology from Hermione Granger. Harry sat down and quickly penned responses.

Harry's birthday plans to get together and go shopping in Diagon Alley with Neville and then eat at Florean Fortesque's were a go. Unfortunately Aaron wouldn't be joining them because his family was going to Greece that week.

On his birthday, they were having fun and browsing through Magical Menagerie when Harry saw and heard a snake. Harry had spoken to garter snakes in the garden growing up and had always liked talking to snakes so he was very surprised when Neville clamped a hand

across his mouth and pulled him from the store into a deserted corner.

He released his hold on Harry and said, "You talk to snakes?"

Suddenly self conscious Harry said, "Yeah what of it?"

"That's dark magic, Harry."

"How is having a conversation dark?"

"I don't know... But You-Know-Who spoke to snakes."

"So I bet loads of people can." Harry looked at Neville's expression and saw the refutation of his assertion. "They can't?"

Neville shook his head. "It's a trait of the Slytherin bloodline. Are you descended from Slytherin?"

"Not that I know of."

Neville paced a bit. "We can't tell anyone until we figure this out."

"If you think that's best."

"Yeah in the meantime do me a favor; don't speak to any more snakes."

"Sure thing." Harry said, trusting his best friend's judgement.

The next week Harry and the Dursleys would be at the Potter family beach house and Harry had instructed his elves to be as little in evidence as possible for his relatives comfort. A couple of weeks later as they did their school shopping together. Neville said, "I think I found an explanation."

"You did? That's great what is it?"

"Well you know I've been studying my family magics?"

"Yes. So have I."

"Well the Longbottom family is really old we actually predate the founders by quite a bit. In one of the oldest family journals one of my ancestors noted a dark spell that allowed for a wizard to steal family magics. To do it the wizard or witch had to kill off the other family line to end it. The tricky part is they have to cast the spell before the final death and if the person casting the spell was the last of their family line and they lost, the spell could revert-

"And take the family magic of the caster instead. So if Voldemort was the last of Slytherin's line and he cast it at me intending to take the Potter family magics; then when whatever happened happened and I got the Slytherin magics instead?"

"I think so. Harry, you can't tell anyone about this spell being in the records of the Longbottoms it would darken my family's reputation considerably."

"I can live with that explanation and I won't say a word." Harry pulled out his list. "Robes check, parchment and inks check, apothecary check, new boots check, supplies for Hedwig check, books and a broom and I'm done. What about you?"

"Books."

"Okay." They headed to Flourish and Blotts. As they entered the store they realized there was some sort of event going on. There was a huge line of witches and the place was a madhouse. There was a book signing for Gilderoy Lockhart, the guy who wrote their defense books for the year, going on.

Neville nodded hello to his roommate Ron Weasley who in turn tried to ignore him. Neville decided to irk his housemate by coming over and doing the mannerly thing. "Hello Ron."

"Neville." he answered stiffly.

"Fred, George, Percy."

"Longbottom."

"You all have met my friend, Harry Potter, right?"

He was half forcing them to introduce him to their mother and the girl with them. Of course he was surprised when Fred and George both brightened.

"Glad to meet you Harry." They shook hands with him. "This is our mother, Molly Weasley and our baby sister Gin-gin."

"Ginny." the little girl corrected them.

Harry politely said, "Mrs. Weasley, Miss Weasley," as he kissed their hands.

^ A short irritable-looking man was dancing around taking photographs with a large black camera that emitted puffs of purple smoke with every blinding flash.

"Out of the way, there," he snarled at Ron, moving back to get a better shot. "This is for the Daily Prophet."

"Big deal." said Ron rubbing his foot where the photographer had stepped on it.

Gilderoy Lockhart heard him. He looked up. He saw Ron-and then he saw Harry. He stared. Then he leapt to his feet and positively shouted, "It can't be Harry Potter?"

The crowd parted, whispering excitedly; Lockhart dived forward, seized Harry's arm and pulled him to the front. The crowd burst into applause. Harry's face burned as Lockhart seemingly shook his hand for the photographer, who was clicking away madly, wafting thick smoke over the Weasleys and Neville.

"Nice big smile, Harry," said Lockhart, through his own gleaming teeth. "Together you and I are worth the front page."

Harry scowled because he could hardly feel his hand the man was holding it so tight. When Lockhart finally let go. Harry was ready to bolt, but then Lockhart threw his arm around Harry's shoulder and clamped him tightly to him.

"Let go." Harry hissed.

"Be quiet." Lockhart hissed back through smiling teeth. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said loudly, waving a hand for quiet. "What an extraordinary moment this is! The perfect moment for me to make a little announcement I've been sitting on for some time!"

He pulled Harry closer. Harry was disgusted to realize the man was pressing his semi-erect manhood into his back. He was so disgusted he missed the next bit of Lockhart's announcement only coming back to himself as Lockhart announced, "He and his schoolmates will, in fact, be getting the real magical me. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I have the great pleasure and pride in announcing that this September I will be taking up the post of Defense against Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!"^

"Move your hand off me, or lose it Lockhart." Harry uttered sotto voce.

Lockhart ignored him in favor of grabbing the books he intended to give Harry for publicity.

Harry didn't hesitate he'd had his fill of this git. He stepped hard on the man's foot, then as Lockhart pulled his foot up, bumping him. Harry stepped back putting a foot behind Lockhart's other leg and leaned his shoulder into Lockhart as if he'd lost his balance knocking Lockhart over. He then stepped purposefully onto Lockhart's hand. "Oh dear, I'm so sorry, did I step on your foot." Never mind he was purposefully grinding his booted foot into Lockhart's hand on the floor.

Lockhart yelped as he felt some bones in his hand snap.

Neville who was watching all this, fought with a sudden desire to choke with laughter. Harry was very graceful and he would never have been this clumsy. But all the other observers would mistake what was happening as simple childhood clumsiness. Neville knew what Lockhart had done to piss Harry off. Harry hated fame and as far as he was concerned publicity was the bane of his existence. Drawing Harry to the front of this crowd for pictures was a sure-fire method for getting on Harry's shit list.

"Oh your hand, I'm so sorry. Let me help you." Harry used his considerable strength to pull Lockhart not just to his feet but all the way forward and over his extended foot and ankle causing the man

to trip and fall face first into his signing table. There was a slight crunch and Lockhart fell back, clutching his face.

"I think my nose is broke."

"I'm so sorry, I guess with the adrenaline, I don't know my own strength." Harry blinked innocently before adding. "It has just been so exciting to meet you." He made eye contact with Lockhart making the man realize he was being sarcastic and the harm was intentional.

Before anything else was said Mr. Flourish said, "Oh dear, dear me, what...We'd better call a medi-wizard. Ladies and gentlemen we'll reschedule the book signing for tomorrow, I'm so sorry. Come, Gilderoy, I'll escort you to St. Mungo's."

Shortly after that Flourish and Blotts was much less crowded. Harry and Neville were on the second floor when a commotion started near the register. They looked down to see Lucius Malfoy and Ron Weasley's dad fighting. They shook their heads but figured it had nothing to do with them so they stayed out of it.

Harry looked at the Lockhart books that he was supposed to get. "Neville, do you mind if I borrow yours before school starts? I want to read them before I put any galleons into them."

"Sure."

"You sure were clumsy today." Neville said, fighting a grin.

"Yeah, must be that growth spurt I had this summer, gotta get coordinated again. Shame I had to find out that way, isn't it?" Harry said straight-faced although his eyes danced with merriment.

"One word of advice, Harry, never try something like that in front of Gran. She'd catch on in no time and then she'd take after you with a string of stinging hexes."

"Noted."

Harry and Neville went to Fortesque's Ice Cream Parlor where most of the study group was waiting for them. Susan Bones lead them in singing Happy Birthday to both Harry and Neville.

Afterwards she said, "I know both your birthdays are at the end of July but this way it's a surprise for both of you."

Both boys were pleased their friends had gone in together to get gift certificates for both of them. Neville's to a nursery for magical plants and Harry's to Quality Quidditch Supplies. Their friends tagged along as Harry went in to buy his broom.

The group entered the store. A salesperson came up. "Can I help you?"

"I'd like to buy a broom."

"For a particular Quidditch position or just general transportation?"

"Seeker." Harry said. After his time with the Slytherin team last year he knew that was the position Marcus wanted him to take.

"Very good, might I suggest the Nimbus 2000 or 2001 both have superior acceleration."

"What's the difference?"

"The 2001 tops out at slightly higher speed. It is also 50 galleons more."

"Fine I'll get it. I'll also need padding appropriate for the position."

When Harry went to pay he discovered that the gift certificate just about paid for the gloves and the forearm guards. He had the store add a wand touch shrink feature to the broom so he could shrink or enlarge it with his wand without breaking the statute of underage sorcery. Ten minutes later they were leaving the store. Harry as excited and chatty as his friends as they reached the door where they ran into the Malfoys.

"Potter." Draco said stiffly.

"Malfoy." Harry returned.

^ "Famous Harry Potter. Can't even go into a bookstore without making the front page. Bet you loved that, didn't you?"^

Harry debated briefly getting angry but since that was what Draco wanted, it would be better to respond counter to Draco's desires. "I know, some of us are just gifted that way." Harry watched with amusement as Draco's face screwed up in fury.

"You, you-"

His father placed a hand on Draco's shoulder and he glowered at Harry. "Draco, Malfoys are always in control. I believe Mr. Potter was just leaving, it would be best to let him pass."

"Thank Mr. Malfoy, but for your information it's Lord Potter. " Harry said carefully watching for any reaction.

Lucius' face tightened. "Indeed, my apologies, Lord Potter."

Harry and his friends passed through the doorway.

That night Harry sat in his room and reflected on his summer. He had passed his belt test and had started to work on the things he would need for the next level. He had started to learn the Potter family history and the Potter family magics. Potter Manse was once again being worked on and his solicitors had finally pried his backlog of mail from Dumbledore and new mail wards were constructed. His homework was done to his usual high standard. Aunt Petunia had helped him and Dudley do their school shopping. Harry having a much better idea of what was and wasn't needed at Hogwarts, had been much more efficient this year. All in all it had been a most satisfactory summer.

Two days later Harry made a visit to Godric's Hollow and his parent's graves. This time he remembered flowers. He was with Cassandra; they had flooed to Godric's Hollow from Potter Place so he didn't feel pressed for time this time.

"Hi Mum, Dad." Harry cleared away some weeds and placed the flowers he'd gotten near the headstone. "My last year was pretty good I tied for second in my class. Turns out I fall in the two percent of people who actually get stronger when their magic is bound. Found out Voldemort isn't as dead as everyone thought. Made some friends. Neville's great.

"Still don't have many answers about what exactly happened when you guys died but I'm working on it. Hopefully by Christmas, I'll have answers. The wheels of justice turn slowly. Dad, I've got people searching for your friend Lupin. My solicitor is meeting with one of the top criminal solicitors day after tomorrow, with his help my questions about Sirius Black should get sorted.

"Dad, I'm a Slytherin. Snape said you'd be rolling in your grave if that's so, I'm sort of sorry. I won't apologize much, though, mostly because this is who I am and I don't live in a black and white world. Maybe you Gryffindors do, but I don't.

"Mum, I really don't see how you could have been friends with the dungeon bat. He's a control freak that never grew up. He took one look at my resemblance to Dad and decided I was just like him, and he seemed to hate me on sight. He's a proper head of house to everyone but me, yet he claims he's only treating me like every other first year. He's an arse. Course he's not the only one. Most of the teachers at Hogwarts qualify for that designation.

"I swear, it seems everyone magical, except Neville, had so many preconceived notions about who I was and what I was going to be like. The magical world seems to be populated with idiots and bigots. If it weren't for the wealth and position that come with being Lord Potter I would really wonder why I should bother. But maybe I'll eventually be in position to change things make them better. Of course to do that, I have to have earned it which basically means I need to work hard now.

"The Ministry finally paid the estate something for taking the cottage, not quite market value but at least something. Dumbledore isn't doing so well. He's lost his Supreme Mugwump position as well as his Chief Warlock, rumor has it he's been redeeming lots of favors just to maintain the position of Headmaster. Lots of people took exception to what happened to me. The solicitors he appointed took the brunt; they are just about bankrupt, but he was still close enough to what happened he got splattered and is no longer considered lilly white.

"Someone I mostly trust is looking after the Wizengamot seat. And Lady Longbottom is seeing to it I make the right sort of connections. I've made a few connections and have people who help me now. I guess that's all my news. So I guess I'll see you next year. Oh, Mum,

I did get your jewelry box to Aunt Petunia, she cried a little but was very happy. Bye."

Harry walked away to Cassandra. Together the two touched the portkey bracelet Harry wore and said, "Potter Place."

Chapter 25 Going Back to Hogwarts

Petunia took Harry to King's Cross the first of September, but when they got there Harry couldn't get through. He checked the time they still had twenty minutes until the train left.

"What is going on Harry? Why can't you go through?"

"I don't know." He frowned. "Tell you what, I'll figure it out. Thank you, Aunt Petunia, this summer was great. Thanks for bringing me to the station."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'll portkey to Potter Place and floo from there. If I have any problems, I'll call okay."

"Alright have a good year. Write."

"I will."

Harry took his trunk and found the men's room. After verifying it was empty, he portkeyed to Potter place. He knew he was supposed to meet Cassandra at the platform so he wasted no time flooing to Platform Nine and Three-quarters. Once there he spoke to one of the station master about the difficulty he'd had coming through the station. The man immediately went over to figure out the problem. Cassandra saw him and hurried over.

"There you are. I need you to sign these. I have a mirror to give you and-"

"Slow down, what is it you need me to sign?"

"There are three form letters to do acknowledgements with I can reproduce them as much as I need to to answer your general mail. Anything I think is worth your attention, statements and what not, I'll duplicate and send to Felicia and your aunt in addition to what I forward to you. The first letter is a general thanks I appreciate your feelings, very bland absolutely committing you to nothing to send in response to fan mail. I figure I can send it and a three by five unsigned photo, the one I made you get on your birthday, that will take care of the bulk of your fan mail. I also have an equally bland

response to general hate mail, specific hate mail or threats will be forwarded to the DMLE. I also have a not at this time letter to send to all requests for endorsement and most all propositions. I'll screen the propositions for the most part, any that I feel are worth your time, like I said, I'll forward via Hedwig once a week."

"Sounds great now what's this about a mirror." Harry was relieved the new mail ward on him made it that all his mail unless sent via Hedwig was redirected to come to Cassandra. She knew what mail he needed to see versus what mail he got. He scanned the letters and signed them.

Cassandra handed him a small rectangular compact. "Sorry for the girlishness of a compact; it was this or something much larger. This is a communication mirror. I have it's match this works a bit like a muggle cell phone in that you can use it to get hold of me anytime. Open it and say my name, mine will vibrate and I'll know you're trying to reach me. I would appreciate it if you kept it to business hours. Don't try to use it in any class except History of Magic, it's not exactly against Hogwarts rules to have one, but it is against them to use it during class. I'll keep any calls I make to you outside of class hours.

"The Manse is coming along nicely, it should be finished by Christmas. I'll be sending you paint chips and fabric swatches next week for the rooms other than the kitchen and baths. The old Mail will probably take a month maybe two. Which leaves me wondering what my next project is?"

"Dossiers."

"What?"

"I want backgrounds: start with my father's friends. I suppose my parents too, since what I know about them would fit an index card. Then Dumbledore and the other teachers at school, then the members of the government and others of influence starting with the ones that were involved with my Godfather's not trial. I don't want just the public stuff. I want complete backgrounds, family info, education, job histories, who their friends are, finances if you can manage it, and any skeletons that you can find without putting yourself in danger. You like research. That's what most of this will be. Everyone has secrets; I want to know those secrets."

Cassandra gulped. "Why?"

"Sandra, I'm a kid. There's not really any way I could have done something to stop Voldemort last time. Yet the Headmaster has tried to manipulate the wizarding world into seeing me as some sort of hero. I think it is in some way related to a prophecy he heard. Superstitious mumbo jumbo...Anyway he tried to manipulate me into Gryffindor and he tried to see to it I'd be ignorant of my heritage. If my aunt were a different sort of person I could have come to the magical world all set to be his pawn. Information is power of a kind. I need it, so I have leverage if they try to force me to do something I don't want to." Harry kept the knowledge of the prophecy to himself.

Cassandra was about to say something when the Corners appeared.

"Harry don't you think you should get on the train?" Felicia asked.

"In a moment Mrs. Corner, Sandra and I were just finishing up a few last minute things."

Cassandra took a deep breath. "I understand, and you're right. I'll do it."

"Thanks and Cassandra, take care, and don't take any risks. It's important, but not as important as you."

"Understood. Have a good year, Harry."

Harry boarded the train as the conductor yelled out, "All aboard!" and it wasn't long before he found Neville, Hermione, Aaron and Susan and Hannah.

"Hey Harry."

"Hay is for horses, Aaron."

Susan and Hannah giggled. "How was your summer, Harry?" Susan asked.

"Good, insanely busy, but good."

"Yeah Neville was telling us about the karate class he was taking at your school." Aaron said.

"It's not my school. It's the dojo where I take karate. How about the rest of you, how was your summer?" His eyes met Hermione's. She looked at him. It wasn't hard to see the angst that rested there. "Mione?" He knew the nickname would make her relax and let her know he held no grudge over last year's behavior.

"My.." She cleared her throat and started again. "My parents took me to France. My summer was good. I read a lot."

"Shocking. Miss Granger reading a lot. Neville, would you ever have dreamed such a thing?" He said with a warm look and a teasing grin.

The rest of the trip to Hogwarts they shared what they had done over the summer. They were interrupted several times as people they knew from other houses stepped in to say hello.

After they changed into their school robes halfway to school, Will and Dan stuck their noses in. "So Harry, did you want to continue defense with us?"

"Hell, yes."

"Cool we'll set up a schedule after class schedules are out."

"Good." Harry nodded. The two Slytherins left, only to have Marcus Flint stick his nose in.

"Mr. Potter."

"Mr. Flint."

"Mind stepping out so we can have a chat while I do my patrol, just to the end of the train and back."

"Not at all." Harry quickly joined the older boy. He had things he wanted to tell Flint. He waited while Marcus cast a privacy spell.

"It has been established that the Weasley twins weren't responsible for last year's end of year prank. The next suspect is you. You should be prepared for some hostility towards you."

"And this is different from last year how?"

"Fair point."

"Mr. Flint, I have come to the conclusion that Dumbledore has done an equally inept job hiring this year's defense instructor as he did last year's."

"What makes you come to that conclusion?"

"I read all the books. Aside from or perhaps I should say in addition to being three-quarter's or more self-aggrandizement, they don't line up. In several places he's two places at once. I've noticed that wizards aren't big in the logic department, but I don't know of any magic that allows that. Also the man, and I use that phrase loosely, is... off. I recommend that the house be on its guard where he's concerned. As much as I hate to say this I would urge a never be alone with him policy. He accosted me in Diagon Alley at Flourish and Blotts. He was semi-aroused while forcing me to stand next to him. Maybe it was more because of the crowd, but I will do whatever I have to to avoid him like I would the plague."

"I will take note of your concerns. Unfortunately I can't do much about them. I will let the Professor know. Now, next topic: did you get a broom?"

"Yes, a Nimbus 2001."

"Great, I." They were interrupted when Marcus had to break up a fight between Roger Davies and another Ravenclaw chaser and one of the Hufflepuff beaters. Marcus took five points each and recommended they save it for the pitch. After a couple more minutes he and Harry resumed their walk. "How's Sandra?"

"Good. Best thing I ever did, hiring her. She's settling well. I have a communication mirror with her if you ever want to borrow it."

"I might, Mum was sober when she picked me up, and was concerned when Uncle Robert threw his little tantrum last summer. She asked me what I knew, I just said she had been offered a job. I didn't say anything else, because Mum has loose lips when drunk."

"That's good, that you didn't say much I mean. So, am I to take it that the official story of this walk is you're checking your cousin's well-being and reaming me over the end of year prank?"

"Yup."

"Cool. Anything else?"

"No try and keep your nose clean this year."

"I'll do my best, but not everything is under my control. One last thing, what's the password since this is private?" By this point they had returned to the compartment Harry shared with his friends.

"Black Mamba."

"Cool. Thanks Marcus."

"That's Mr. Flint to you."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Seventh Year Prefect, sir."

Marcus dropped the privacy spell. "You just watch yourself, Potter."

Hermione had a relieved look when he came back. "What was that about?"

"Getting chewed out for the end of term prank I pulled."

"That was you!" all three girls nearly shrieked in unison.

"Yes."

"Harry that wasn't very nice at all." Susan said half scolding, half pouting.

"I know but neither was the way I got treated last year. I got treated like a leper by just about everyone for most of the year. I thought a reminder that none of us is perfect would not come amiss."

Hermione checked herself, instead of spouting off as she was tempted to do. Harry had been treated abominably by most everyone last year, even the study group had been fearful of him for no reason at first. She noticed Hannah and Susan seemed to come

to the same conclusion. Then she noticed the other two boys weren't surprised by this revelation, "You two knew, didn't you?"

Neville and Aaron shared a look, and Neville spoke up, "Hermione, we were at points last year being treated as badly as Harry, and like him not necessarily just by students. In point of fact Dumbledore strongly suggested I stop being friends with Harry, and yes that is the HEADMASTER Dumbledore."

Aaron spoke next, "And I have been attacked more than once by Gryffindors and since there were no witnesses your head of house has brushed it off at best, and I'm talking about getting beaten up to the point that it took Skele-grow to fix. Do know how much it hurts to regrow bones?"

All three girls got slightly stricken looks on their faces.

"Enough, hopefully this year things will be better. I want to warn all of you though. I don't trust the new Defense teacher."

"But Harry..."

"Don't let his pretty, glossy, exterior fool you. I read his books. They are eighty nine percent information about him, and eleven percent useful information that you could get from other less expensive sources. His timelines have him in two places at once more than once, and frankly the way he accosted me in Flourish and Blotts, I got a serious pervert vibe."

"What do you mean 'he accosted you', Harry?" Susan asked suspiciously.

"He grabbed me and forced me to be in front of the press, not a place I care to be. But if that wasn't enough, he held me close enough that he was-" Harry shuddered. "pressed against me." His voice reeked of disgust.

Aaron, Hermione, Susan, and Neville's eyes widened. Most of them had either gotten "the talk" that year or the year before. Aaron asked the question in all their minds, "Do you mean?"

Harry nodded vigorously.

"Oh my God." Hermione squeaked.

Hannah looked at them "What? I don't get it."

Five sets of horrified eyes whipped to her.

Susan looked appalled, but decided this information was too important not to share. Blushing brightly she said, "I'll explain in the dorm tonight."

Neville lost his appalled look and got a very curious expression on his face. "Is that why you?"

Harry's expression changed to an impish one and he nodded. " You didn't think I did that just because of a few pictures, did you?"

"I wasn't sure."

The two ignored the puzzled looks from the other four. Harry said, "Just be careful not to be alone with him. Warn your housemates. Enough slimy stuff. New topic: wizard's chess, I need someone good to play against. I lost the first sixteen games of chess and go I played this summer. I need to find someone to play against so I can keep my skills sharp this year."

Hermione and Neville looked at each other. "Ron Weasley plays a pretty intense chess game."

"Fine, I'll issue a challenge once I get settled in this year."

"So Harry, I wanted to ask: how's Sandra doing? Uncle Robert disinherited her, he was so mad. I think that the thought Aunt Angelica would leave him was the only thing that kept him from doing a full disowning." Aaron asked.

"She's great, I have a communication mirror if you want to borrow it some time. Best thing I ever did, hiring her as my personal assistant."

Hermione snorted. "Personal assistant? What does a twelve year old need a personal assistant for?"

"Hermione do the words 'lord' and 'celebrity' mean anything to you?" Harry growled. "I hired Cassandra to deal with the mail I get, to coordinate stuff for my properties, and to do research for me. So far she's done an outstanding job."

Hermione blushed and looked at the floor. "Sorry," she mumbled.

"Forgiven." Harry noticed that it was now dark outside and the train was slowing. "Looks like we're in Hogsmeade now."

The six of them gathered up the items they would need for the evening and left everything else for the Hogwarts elves. Aaron and Harry were the last to leave the compartment. "Aaron, if you wanted, you could join Neville and I in the mornings. I could teach you some defense."

"I'd like that but I don't know how much good it would do me I have a condition it makes me prone to breaking bones easily."

"Brittle bone disease?"

"That's what my nana called it. You've heard of it?"

"Yes. But I thought it was rare."

"It is. I have a mild form. It's the Yaxley curse. Most Yaxleys have it. My family is lucky: of my father's sons I'm the only one that has it. Cassandra's had two brothers and a sister die from it. Lucky for me there are potions that help my bones be stronger. That's why I want to be a potions master." Aaron exited the compartment.

That didn't match up with what little Harry knew about the disease. He pulled the compact out. "Cassandra."

A moment later he saw Cassandra's face in the mirror. "Yes?"

"I've got another research project for you. This one is more urgent. I want you to go to the main public library in London, get the librarian to help you find everything you can in terms of muggle research into a medical condition known as brittle bone disease."

She gave him a are you nuts look, but said, "Okay by when?"

"Two weeks."

As he left the train Harry heard Hagrid calling, "Firs' years, Firs' years over 'ere." He glanced at the first years and felt slightly poleaxed as his emerald eyes met silvery gray. Ignoring a sudden urge to curse and an even stronger urge to go over and make her acquaintance, Harry moved rapidly towards the carriages.

Chapter 26 The Start of School

Harry wanted to curse. He tried to ignore the sorting, he really did. And he succeeded but not until after she was sorted. He now had a name to go with the dreamy silvery gray eyes. Luna Lovegood. He found himself torn between the urge to scream in frustration and the urge to smash his head on the Slytherin table. About the only bright spot he could find in all this was at least the girl wasn't a Gryffindor, as a Ravenclaw she would be socially acceptable to most of his housemates...

Why was he even thinking that way? Love at first sight was a myth, the dream of poets and romantics. Harry was practical and a realist, who cared if there was a family legend that the Potters dreamed of their future spouse when they turned eleven. There was no way that was real. Love, contrary to rumor, took time to grow, it was based on knowing someone having a commitment to that person. Passion, chemistry those were sometimes instant; it was possible to be attracted to someone instantly, thus, the love at first sight myth but Harry wasn't sure how that applied to his situation, after all he was only twelve, he didn't think he was being hit by adolescent hormones at least not yet. He stared morosely at his plate and picked at the food on it.

At the end of the feast he tramped back to the Slytherin dorm. He looked forward to seeing Hedwig and wondered if he'd have a roommate this year. He was surprised that just after the first years arrived the house was called to a house meeting.

Professor Snape was there in all his intimidating glory looking rather vampirish. "Good evening, I am Professor Snape, Head of Slytherin House, and Potions Master of Hogwarts. Slytherin House has a long and powerful history. You were chosen for this house because you are cunning and ambitious see to it your classroom performance reflects that. Homework takes place before play. If you need help for a class, ask. There are always older students and students who excel to tutor you if you are struggling.

"This school has rules. Know them, obey them, if you break them don't get caught, or if you do, don't come whining to me expecting me to fix it. There have been changes since last year, it is more important than ever to keep up appearances because my hands have been tied when it comes to protecting and rewarding you. As

such, the following will apply: for every detention you receive from one of the other teachers, know you will be writing me an essay about what rule you broke why that rule exists, and how and why you got caught. Essays will start at one foot and will get six inches longer with every offense. After a fifth offense I will add a detention with me for every one given by another teacher.

"Outside these walls are those that mistake ambition and cunning for darkness. Always remember intent is everything, darkness can exist everywhere. Outside these walls there are others that will hate and quite possibly attack you. For this reason there are certain rules. Inner house conflicts don't exist beyond the walls of this dorm. If you are in conflict with someone in the House come to me or one of the prefects. We will help you to resolve it. As Slytherins we always present a united front. To do otherwise weakens us all. Never give anyone outside of Slytherin the password to the dorm. This is for your safety and the safety of your fellow snakes. Finally, no one goes anywhere alone. Always stay with your year group or with an older student. Obey this rule. It is for your own safety.

"While you are here your well-being is my responsibility to do that I must get to know you. I will be meeting with each of you over the next few weeks and we will set expectations for each of you for the year. I will also require that you have a physical with Madame Pomfrey, if you feel ill or distressed I am here for you. But do not, I repeat, do not mistake my care and concern for you as benevolence or as license to behave like delinquents. I in general, despise children. You are here because society has deemed you to be young adults ready to learn the responsibility of magic. See to it you don't regress. I will guide you so you can become the best witch or wizard you can be. You are here for a reason; I will know that reason and help you to attain it if possible. I do not, however have the time or the desire to hold your hand through your school experience. As such I expect you to be responsible young men and women. Complete your schoolwork to the very best of your ability. No sex without protective charms for both participants. If you don't know them ask me or Madame Pomfrey. You notice I'm not foolish enough to deny you do it. But for Merlin's sake be responsible, and don't come whining to me if your heart gets broken. Stupidity i.e. drinking, fighting, potions use or rather abuse, all nighters are to be kept to a minimum. Also regularly checking of the announcement board is required. I will not spend my valuable time making sure that each of you know the information that you should if it has been

posted.

"Second years, your Saturdays – as soon as individual meetings have finished - will have a two hour class. It's focus is manners and mores of the magical world. Slytherins are not ignorant; etiquette is required to get ahead in this world. Most, but not all, of you have learned such things at home. I will not have your prospects hampered by ignorance so plan on attending those classes. Fifth years, it's OWLS year. Plan to study accordingly. I will accept nothing less than an acceptable in every class. Seventh years, the same is true for your NEWTS.

"I have office hours, if you need my help or my advice use them. In this dorm there are six older students whose job it is to act as my eyes and ears and to enforce the rules. Marcus Flint, and Aurelia Damascus are the seventh year prefects and the student leaders of Slytherin. Elena Danforth and Sean MacKinnon are the sixth year prefects,. Lyle Howith and Calliope Mulciber are the fifth year's look to them for your example. Also if you need help with your classes they will help you find an appropriate tutor. First through fifth years, the prefects have your class schedules. Collect them then head to bed, rest is a requirement for learning, as is eating, do both or suffer my wrath. Sixth and seventh years see me. Good night."

The two fifth years called the first and second years to them to collect their schedules. Harry quickly collected his and entered the hallway to his room. He was surprised to see Blaise Zabini was his assigned roommate. He opened the door, and grinned to see that one of his elves had unpacked Hedwig's perch and she was on it asleep. A few minutes later Blaise joined him, looking very nervous.

"It's okay Zabini, contrary to popular rumor, I don't bite."

"You're not mad that you don't have a room to yourself? I mean last year..."

"No, last year was Nott's choice. I had nothing to do with it. How was it with him and Goyle last year?"

"Annoying."

"I can imagine. Do you have a problem if my owl stays here? She dislikes the owlery and prefers to stay with me."

" No. How does she...you know, get here?"

"No clue. I think maybe the house elves help her." Harry pulled his toiletries from his trunk and headed to the boys' bathroom. He could hear the boys in other rooms. Crabbe and Goyle were apparently roommates and had left their door open. He could see them arm wrestling for who got first choice of bed. On his way back, he overheard Nott telling Malfoy that it didn't matter who his daddy was, Draco was an idiot and had better do as he was told or Nott would hex him.

The next morning Harry packed his bag for Charms which would be a double class, followed by DADA, followed by History of Magic. Harry reflected he was glad he had gotten an new ever full dicta-quill, it was the only thing that made history bearable. He laughed when he realized he had one class with each of the other houses today so he'd get the chance to greet all of his year mate friends. At breakfast he ignored the glares from the head table and talked with Will and Dan figuring out the best time for his defense tutoring, mentally Harry called it his defense class given who was actually teaching defense. He shook his head about the chaos over at the Gryffindor table, why the old tabby waited until this morning to hand out schedules he'd never know. The bat's method was far more efficient. Harry privately grinned. His personal designations for the staff were far from complimentary: Headbastard, old tabby, dungeon bat, mole, butterfly, should have been exorcised, pervert, goshawk, and head in the clouds. He supposed Sinistra and Hooch weren't really that bad. Sinistra was stupid to not to realize the advances that muggles had made in Astronomy and incorporate them into her class. And he really didn't understand why there wasn't a planetarium in the school for an astronomy class. Rolanda Hooch was just was such a goshawk sort of person totally focused on just her area of expertise. He gathered up, 'well off to class' he thought.

The next day Harry's day ended with Transfiguration. Thanks to Flint's warning Harry was ready to face the old tabby's accusation. "Mr. Potter, stay after class a moment if you please."

"Yes, Professor, may I help you?"

"Your prank of last year requires...restitution?"

"Prank? Do you mean my prank on the Weasley twins? But Professor, I was already punished for that."

"No I mean your prank at the end of term feast."

"I.." he pretended shocked dismay, "Why you are accusing me of that I don't know, but may I say: I don't find it at all funny."

"So you are telling me that you were not responsible for the nasty prank at the end of year feast."

"Professor, I find the very accusation reprehensible. May I ask what this is based on? As you may recall, I was confined to my dormitory from the time I left Headmaster Dumbledore's Office following Quirrell's escape with the stone until the students left for the Express. If there is some proof for this accusation I would like to see it, otherwise I have to assume that I am being treated as a scapegoat merely because I pulled a successful prank on the Weasley twins and I am Slytherin. In which case I believe I want to talk to Lady Longbottom and possibly the board of governors."

Inwardly Harry smirked at how fast she back-pedaled as he left the classroom.

All the students in the school found that the tone of classes had changed. Harry found the tighter rules governing the teachers made for better classes. School wide, the House rivalries had intensified at first, but after some fights based on house rivalry between more volatile members of houses when all participants got month long detentions with Filch, regardless of house, things calmed down. The Slytherins still had to be cautious but things were in general better.

At the end of the second week of school when Harry received his weekly delivery from Cassandra. In it was the research he'd asked for and a note.

Harry,

I don't know why you asked for this research but it explains something that is very important for my family. Something that we had always just assumed was a family curse, but that apparently is

something quite different. I only understand a little about genetics but I'm spending my non-working hours studying biology, genetics and anatomy and physiology in hopes of getting a better understanding...Part of me wants to curse you (for my theater and movie hours being curtailed) but most of me wants to thank you. This could wind up being very important for my family.

Thanks for sending back just the paint chips, carpet samples and fabrics you liked instead of all the samples I sent. The Manse should be mostly done next week. The goblins will be doing the wards after that. You'll still need to sort the furnishings from Potter Place and the beach house and we'll need to shop for the rest but the elves are very excited.

As for your fan mail, I've gotten through the first three years backlog. In terms of current mail there hasn't been much except for a letter from Nicholas Flamel. You didn't tell me you knew him! Anyway the letter is there. I might suggest for the future if there is anyone whom you correspond with whose letters you don't want me to read, you give me their names. That will allow you and them privacy. And that way I won't be left with questions like: what the hell was he talking about a trap for a dark lord at Hogwarts last year?

Last I've made a list of people on whom to create dossiers. I want you to look it over. If there is anyone else whom you feel needs to be added, send me their names. Take care and study hard.

Sandra

Harry quickly thumbed through the enclosed papers until he came to Flamel's letter.

Dear Mr. Potter,

Thank you for your letter informing me of the outcome of Albus' trap for a dark lord. I suspect age has done him no favors. Setting such a thing up in a school full of children. Perenelle calls it reprehensible. I call it idiocy. Your observations about wizards are remarkably astute. There are reasons Perenelle and I no longer carry on much with wizarding society. You show promise just as your four greats grandfather did. Alexander Potter was a good friend, so, if you wish to correspond, I might be open to it you dry and witty observations make for an enjoyable if impertinent read. N.F.

Classes were interesting. Harry and Neville resumed their workouts in the unused classroom, and the study group started meeting in the library. The study group members got odd looks from their house mates since the group was made up of two Gryffindors, two Hufflepuffs, one Ravenclaw, and three Slytherins. Two weeks into school they added another Hufflepuff, another Slytherin and two Ravenclaws, as they were joined by Blaise Zabini, Ernie MacMillan, Padma Patil and Kevin Entwhistle. The newer students were surprised when Aaron stopped by and tutored for potions. Harry kept his study sessions with Will and Dan to just himself, Neville and Aaron. When Harry shared the results of Cassandra's research with Aaron the older boy half drove Harry crazy with questions about what were genes, and what did it mean that collagens didn't form correctly, what was physiotherapy and what were biophosphonates? Harry finally handed him the mirror and said, "Ask your cousin, and be careful not to lose my mirror."

Harry had little trouble with either the theory or the practical portions of his classes. The exception was predictably Defense Against the Dark Arts. Lockhart lived up to (or perhaps it was better to say lived down to) Harry's expectations. Harry was thrilled that he hadn't spent a knut on the pervert's worthless books. Harry cringed when he heard how Neville's second class went. Harry's next classes with the man involved him hauling Harry to the front of the room to act out a scene from one of his books. That stroke of brilliance had the Slytherins in stitches, because Harry didn't hesitate; he handed Lockhart his ass every time. It only took a couple demonstrations for him to start calling on other students. Then came quidditch tryouts.

Harry was one of seventeen people who came out for the tryout. Flint had decided to make the team be the best. He required everyone interested try out. Harry, Draco Malfoy and Terrance Higgs all tried out for the seeker position. It didn't take very long because Harry spotted the snitch and captured it before Higgs even saw it, and Harry was practically on top of it before Draco noticed it. Marcus saw some promise in Draco, however, and suggested he try for a chaser position. In the end the team wound up being Flint as captain and chaser, Montague chaser, Warrington chaser, Bole Beater, Derrick Beater, Pucey Keeper, Potter Seeker, with Draco Malfoy reserve chaser and reserve seeker. Malfoy wasn't happy, but given his standing in Slytherin didn't complain too much lest he become a target. Practices were set for three days a week for two hours.

Harry's free time was divided between researching snow phoenixes, elemental magic, prophecy and continuing his occulmency training and trying to educate himself on topics he found of interest. He also used his map to keep an eye on Lockhart. Or more specifically Lockhart's behavior with the student body.

Harry's meeting with Snape was one of the last ones held. Harry didn't care because he knew what he wanted to do and really didn't like his Head of House. He showed up at the appointed time anyway.

"Mr. Potter."

"Sir."

"I wasn't precisely fair to you last year, I thought I saw things about you that were not there and I treated you accordingly. Despite that you acquitted yourself very well, and I hope this year we can get off to a better start. Have a seat."

As Professor Snape looked at him, he saw thoughts race behind Harry's eyes; last year he had tried to legilimence the boy, but had been unable to do so. He didn't even try. The boy didn't sit in the chair but instead remained standing.

"Permission to speak freely, sir?"

Snape inclined his head.

"You are my Head of House, however, let's not kid ourselves that you give a rat's ass about me. I am Lord Potter. My father, James Potter, whom I resemble greatly, was an ass and your rival in school according to my mum. You, for whatever reason, haven't grown up enough to differentiate between us. I respect your abilities as a Potion Master. I respect the Head of House and professorial positions which you hold. But I do not like you or even respect you. Holding a grudge against an eleven year old child for something his deceased father did a decade or more ago is childish and reprehensible. I do not trust you and I doubt you to be enough of an adult to understand such things as trust need to be earned. My mother regretted the dissolution of your friendship and how it came about, but frankly I'm of the opinion given the type of adult you've proven yourself to be, she was better off without your friendship. I

expect if she could see the way you have treated me, she would concur.

"Thanks to Mr. Flint, I know how these things are supposed to go. My health and family life are fine. Pomfrey got the results from my recent checkup the second day of school. I know the rules of the house and the school. I am aiming to be in the top five in my year again this year and I have the skills and contacts to do so. With your permission if I meet my goals I will ask Mr. Flint to continue our arrangement of him shopping in Hogsmeade for my rewards as we did last year. Is there anything else, Professor?"

Professor Snape found himself at a loss for words. The scathing diatribe he'd just received, delivered in such an adult manner, while looking into those green eyes, made it seem he was back in fifth year getting reamed by Lily. He shook his head, gathered the papers he had in front of him and beat a hasty retreat to his quarters where he did something he'd not done since the night Lily died. He got totally smashed.

When the Slytherin etiquette class started everyone was given a written test that was followed by a formal luncheon. Snape presided over both with an eagle eye. Two hours later he dismissed Draco, Harry, Blaise and Daphne, saying their manners were adequate until the more advanced lessons that would be taught in March, but that the rest of them needed work. Harry, Blaise, and Daphne spent the next couple weeks coaching Tracey and by mid October she too was dismissed until March's lessons.

At this point Harry was going into withdrawal about strategy so he issued his challenge to Ron Weasley. He stopped by the Gryffindor on Saturday morning. "Mr. Weasley, Neville tells me you play a mean game of chess. I find myself desiring a challenge. What do you say?"

Harry ignored the boy as he wiped his face with the sleeve of his robe instead of using a napkin.

"You think a snake like you can match me, Potter?" the redhead growled.

Harry nodded his ascent.

"You're on, half an hour so I can get my set from the dorm. Here or in the library?"

"Here is fine."

Harry's birthday present to himself had been a wizarding chess set. He'd played one game against Neville but had dominated the game. The chess pieces had irritated him at the time by shouting advice in their tiny voices. He told them to shut up or he would deliberately send them into danger even if it meant he'd lose. They hadn't spoken in the two games he'd played against Blaise, which was just the way Harry liked it.

Harry was surprised when Ron Weasley let him be white. He took it for a mark of over confidence, but five moves into the game, both boys smiled because they both recognized that the other would give them an actual challenge. Five minutes later the pace of the game slowed as both boys spent more time considering their moves. A half an hour later Harry smiled as he moved his bishop, "Check".

Ron Weasley scowled because he could see how in four more moves Harry would win. He looked hard at the board. Was there anything he could do? Then he saw it it would make the game end in a draw, but better than a loss. Ten minutes later he did something he thought he would never do.

He extended his hand to a Slytherin. "Good game. We'll have to do this again."

"Same time, two weeks?"

"You're on."

Chapter 27 The Trial of Sirius Black Part 1

Stephen Corner tagged along behind behind Jamieson Fawcett, this was what he hoped would be the only meeting with members of the ministry before Sirius Black was finally tried. When he had met with Mr. Fawcett back in August, Stephen had explained his concerns about what might happen opening this can of worms.

"Mr. Fawcett, thank you for meeting with me, Tiberius Ogden recommended you to me."

"What laws have you broken? I'll tell you what it will cost you."

"I haven't broken any, but I have evidence that several were broken at the end of the last war. I need a barrister of your caliber and knowledge to set things right. The fundamental right of a trial was denied someone. We suspect it was mostly politically motivated for control. The person in Azkaban may even be innocent of what he was charged with, unlikely but it's possible."

"Control? If you're involved, that would mean control over Harry Potter would it not? Which would mean...Sirius Black never got a trial?"

"Very quick.."

"Yes, it helps I was only three years ahead of those four hoodlums and my mum was best friends with Dorea Potter nee Black. Hmm. I guess our biggest questions are going to be who, why, and what did they gain. If we know that then we will know what leverage we can offset with."

"Well, so far my firm has discovered that Albus Dumbledore wanted control of Lord Potter and placed him with his muggle aunt without asking. Sirius Black was the first named guardian in Lord Potter's parents' wills. Other potential reasons include he is Lord Black the Black Family fortune is substantial and were Sirius Black to die in Azkaban other Family members say Narcissa Malfoy might be able to claim it."

"Why is Albus Dumbledore so interested in controlling Lord Potter?"

"That would require an oath."

"To you or to Lord Potter?"

"To him and I am authorized to accept it on his behalf."

"By him?"

"By his magical trustees, of which I am one."

"Hmm. So you wish for me to do what exactly?"

"See that Sirius Black receives a fair trial. My client and nominally magic ward wants answers about what happened years ago. But other than a fair trial Lord Potter has no other agenda. If Black is guilty by all means may he continue to rot in that hellhole, but otherwise..."Stephen trailed off.

"And those that wish for things to remain as they are?"

"Hardly deserve the title Englishman, after all, what sort of Englishman doesn't believe in due process of law."

"In other words kick over some stones and see what crawls out."

"Exactly."

"Any ideas who we're talking about other than Dumbledore and the Malfoys?"

"Bartemius Crouch, Bagnold's dead, I'm not sure who else."

"Who were the arresting officers?"

"Alastor Moody, Kyle Brown, who died two years ago when he saved a couple kids from a nutcase looking for immortality, and a rookie John Dawlish."

"Moody would have been personally motivated. James was his godson; if he thought Black was guilty, he might not have asked as many questions as he should have. Dawlish is still one of the dimmer bulbs in the box... And we can't exactly query a dead man."

"Allies?"

"Tiberius, and Lady Longbottom, but other than the two of them, we haven't wanted to stir the pot for fear of the problem simply being silenced, leaving us with just questions. Tiberius said you would know who to speak to."

"Hmm, well obviously Amelia Bones, Rufus Scrimgeour, probably the new Chief Warlock ...once those three know the biggest trick will be getting Fudge to allow the trial without consulting Dumbledore or Malfoy."

All of which led to this morning's meeting. He entered the meeting room behind Jamieson Fawcett and sat down, quill in hand, ready to take notes. When Amelia Bones and Scrimgeour entered, he stood and shook hands, then resumed his seat, while Jamieson started the meeting.

"Amelia, Rufus, thank you for coming. I know I can trust the two of you to keep what is said here in confidence. In November 1981 there was a gross miscarriage of justice that took place, I hold neither of you responsible but we owe it to all citizens of the magical world to correct it. Because uncorrected it sets a dangerous precedent to the rights of all citizens."

Amelia Bones' features took on a granite like expression. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Sirius Black. I was approached a month ago by Stephen here. He brought it to my attention Sirius Black never had a trial; he was signed into Azkaban on Bartemius Crouch's order but never received a trial."

"Are you sure?" Scrimgeour growled.

"Positive, I went over the courts time logs. Every minute is accounted for so there was no secret trial. The man was chucked into prison without a trial." Jamieson replied.

"That is grave news indeed." Amelia looked very thoughtful. After several minutes she said, "What is your interest in all this, Stephen?"

"Questions from a client wanting answers, a desire for justice. Something like this reflects badly on all of us in the legal field."

"Show me what you've found." She stated. Forty five minutes later all four of them sat back.

"Our new Chief Warlock, Cecil Warwick, won't be a problem. We send him a brief, and he'll probably reschedule the upcoming calendar to get it dealt with promptly. The trick will be getting Fudge on board." Scrimgeour stated. "He probably has taken bribes to look the other way."

"Leave Cornelius to me." Amelia drawled. "In the meantime, Rufus, I want you to personally see Black into protective custody use Shacklebolt, trainee Tonks, Spencer and Ferguson. Go do it now before anyone gets wind of this."

The Head of the Aurors nodded.

Amelia said, "Jamieson, Stephen I want the two of you to come with me to meet with Fudge tomorrow."

The next morning she lead the way to Minister Fudge's office.

Once there she spoke to the secretary "Mindy, I have a nine o'clock."

" Yes, you have the next two hours in his schedule, Director."

Moments later she was ushering them into the office.

"Amelia, what can I do for you today?" Cornelius Fudge said.

"Actually Cornelius, I wanted to do something for you. It has come to my attention through the efforts of these two gentlemen, that the previous administration made a grievous error and set a very dangerous precedent. Jamieson, how about you tell Minister Fudge what you found."

"Well Minister, Mr. Corner here brought it to my attention that the previous administration denied a fundamental right to a member of one of the oldest pureblood families at the end of the last war. The right to a trial, shocking though that may be to you. After all to deny

a right to trial, is to deny something that makes us British, don't you agree? Of course you do. I'm sure you are as appalled as I am that the former Chief Warlock didn't catch this and probably the man involved is guilty but correcting this oversight is far preferable to letting it hang over and taint your administration, don't you agree?"

Cornelius heard the word 'taint' and shuddered most of the Ministry thought him weak and foolish since he had followed Albus Dumbledore so closely. If this, whatever it was, allowed him to distance himself from that man, and cast his administration in a good light he was in favor of it. "Of course I do."

"I'm so glad you agree, Cornelius. I'll see about scheduling a trial for Sirius Black as soon as possible. In the meantime, I'll have him moved into the lockdown at St. Mungo's to ensure he is fit to stand trial in a couple of weeks. I and these nice gentlemen will get out of your hair, I'm sure you have important things to do." Amelia smiled at the confusion in the Minister's eyes as she swept out of his office.

She had been the newly named Head of the Auror Department at the end of the last war and had been quite dissatisfied at the number of questions surrounding the deaths of James and Lily Potter. When she'd gone to Dumbledore he'd claimed his hands were tied, then when she had tried to force the issue, she had been told point blank by Bartimieus Crouch, then Head of the DMLE, and Minister Bagnold, to drop it or might cost her more than just her job. Given that she was the last living relative of her grandniece and had just been given custody she had dropped it, but it had never sat right with her. This opportunity wasn't one to be passed on.

At Hogwarts, Harry finished the last of his transfiguration essay and considered carefully how he wished to proceed on the information he'd found out about Azkaban and its denizens, and what that meant for him. He'd actually been mulling over the information for a while but it was only the letter he's gotten this morning from Mr. Corner that had him deciding to act on what he'd found out. He found a deserted classroom and pulled out his mirror to Cassandra.

"Cassandra?"

It took a minute but then he saw Cassandra's face, "Hey Harry, what's up?"

"I need you to do something."

"I figured as much."

"The magical world has psychologists and psychiatrists right?"

"Huhn?"

"Healers who specialize in treating mental disorders?"

"You mean Mind Healers?"

"I guess so. If my godfather is – as we suspect – innocent, he's is likely to be seventy percent or more crazy from having been around dementors so much for the past decade. He's going to need serious mental help to work through stuff. Right?"

"I guess."

"Okay, I want you to find out what mind healer knows the most about dementor exposure and get him or her to agree to treat my godfather, if he's innocent. Get a commitment. Pay what we need to, up to I don't know say 10,000 galleons."

"Are you sure? How do you think he'll feel about it? I mean most people get very upset if they get told they need to see a mind healer."

Harry muttered something under his breath that Cassandra was sure would make his aunt and Lady Longbottom wash out his mouth.

He took a deep breath, "I know that there are certain stigmas attached to getting mental help. There used to be in the muggle world too, but it has been proven to be helpful for thousands in the muggle world, and after what I've read about the dementors frankly I'm not sure I could or would trust my godfather without him getting some kind of help. Look into it for me?"

Cassandra looked at his pleading face in the mirror and smiled. "How can I resist those pleading eyes? I'll do it."

Sirius Black was very confused. It had been just another day in cheerful Azkaban where out of the blue, two aurors came, put him in

magic suppression shackles and pulled him from his cell. "What the bloody hell?" he said.

"Shut up."

They took him out of the prison.

He felt as if he would get drunk on the air because it lacked the fear filled taint of the dementors.

They loaded him on a boat to take him back to shore. Once there, they were met by Rufus Scrimgeour and another auror with a portkey. Sirius was still trying to figure out what was happening when Scrimgeour said. "Touch this."

Sirius and the two aurors were snatched away. When they stopped he recognized the location, it was one of three lockdown rooms the DMLE had at St. Mungo's. Sirius wondered why he was here, but wasn't about to complain. The trio of two aurors and prisoner were met at St. Mungo's by a third auror who Sirius half remembered as being a brand new trainee. The black man looked him up and down.

"He looks better than I would have thought. Alright Black, I want you to listen, and listen good. It has come to the attention of the DMLE and the current minister that you never got a trial. It has been decided to rectify that. You will be given a chance to clean up and get some decent food. In exchange you will do exactly as you're told, and wait here patiently for your trial, and not give any of us a lick of trouble. Do you understand? You will sit here, and be the most cooperative bastard you can be, and you'll get your day in court. You make any trouble and after what you did to James and Lily Potter, I will have no trouble putting you down, hard. Are we clear?"

With a voice that was rusty from disuse, Sirius answered, "Crystal."

Kingsley Shacklebolt led the prisoner to a bathroom. Once there he aimed his wand at Sirius.

Spencer who brought him with Scrimgeour removed the shackles.

Sirius was somewhat surprised. Kingsley said a quick spell that was designed to kill body lice and fleas - both of which Sirius had, despite his best efforts.

"Strip, then shower. Spencer will get you a clean robe."

Embarrassing though it was strip and shower in front of someone, Sirius did as he was told. His dirty and tattered prison robe was incindioed by the auror. He washed himself head to toe four times, before he felt as if the taint of Azkaban had been washed from his skin. He dried himself quickly and wrapped his towel around his waist, then looked at the black auror. "Could I have a shaving spell?"

A moment later he was clean-shaven and was handed a comb, a toothbrush, and some toothpaste. Spencer came in and handed him a clean prisoner's robe. Sirius quickly pulled it on, then finished his ablutions. He was led back to the holding cell.

Sirius was surprised when a few moments later a healer came in. He cast a couple of diagnostic charms. He didn't say anything, just went back out.

Half an hour later a tray with food and three potions appeared. Sirius was thrilled to see a cup of hot chocolate, a bowl of hearty beef barley soup, an apple, a small salad, and two freshly baked rolls on the tray. He had to force himself to eat slowly; it looked and smelled so good. He finished the meal then drank the potions which he recognized as a nutrient potion, a cheering potion and dreamless sleep.

The following morning when Sirius awoke, he saw two new people one of whom seemed somewhat familiar but she also appeared too young for him to have gone to school with her. The woman auror noticed he was awake and sent off a message. She watched him. but didn't say anything. Ten minutes later another tray appeared This time it had a bowl of porridge, a soft boiled egg. Toast, a half a grapefruit, hot chocolate and tea in addition to another nutrient potion. Sirius sat quietly on his bed. He wondered how long it had been. All he knew was that it had been a long time. About half an hour later a man came into the ward and showed the two aurors watching Sirius a piece of paper. They nodded and after taking his wand and conjuring a chair for him they let him in the holding cell. Then cast privacy charms between the cell and the observation area.

The man pulled a file folder, a quill, and some parchment from a pocket and said, "Mr. Black, my name is Jamieson Fawcett and I

was hired to represent you in these proceedings. You should be informed that while I will represent you to the best of my ability and see that you get a fair trial, my actual employer's only interest in all of these proceedings is to get to the bottom of what happened Halloween 1981. Innocent or guilty, I have no stake in the outcome of these proceedings. With that in mind do you wish for me to represent you?"

Sirius thought over what was said. He was innocent of the main crimes he was in Azkaban for so he said, "Yeah. But I have to ask. Who is your employer?"

"That's confidential. You can find out after the trial."

"Oh. Okay. So, how long has it been anyway?"

"It's almost eleven years."

Sirius was stunned. He had thought five maybe six, but eleven? Hell, eleven years meant Harry was already at Hogwarts. When he died, James and Lily would have his hide; failing his godson like that. He was surprised they hadn't already found a way to get their revenge.

"I want to go over the charges you're facing and what happened and get your take on it. That way I'll know how to proceed." He flipped open the file folder. "Conspiracy to commit murder, doing magic in front of muggles, thirteen counts of murder, twenty two counts of battery. Aurors report you laughing unrepentantly and saying 'it's all my fault' before they stunned you. Your wand was confiscated as evidence.

"So what happened that night, Mr. Black."

"Conspiracy to commit murder?"

"Yes, you revealing the location of James and Lily Potter to You-Know-Who and their subsequent murders."

"I wasn't their Secret Keeper, but it was all my fault they're dead, because I persuaded them to use the rat."

"The rat?"

"Peter Pettigrew, our friend," his rusty voice dripped with sarcasm. "He- we, were unregistered animagi. Prongs was a stag, I'm a dog, and Wormtail- Wormtail was a rat. A dirty, stinking, traitor of a rat, the order had a spy, you see. We thought it was Moony, but it wasn't. It was Peter. Weakling that he was. Guess he was sneakier and smarter than we gave him credit for being though. James and I figured that everyone would believe I was the secret keeper because we were so close, so we thought we'd pull a fast one and asked Peter to do it. I'd be a target and Pete could be safe; after all who would expect shy, weak, unassuming Peter to hold a secret for flamboyant James when I was around.

"But it all backfired, didn't it. Peter betrayed them and framed me for it. It was early November 4, 1981 shortly after midnight outside a muggle nightclub when I finally caught up to him. He screamed how I'd betrayed them. I was quiet because the whole time he was shouting he was cutting off his own finger and I was trying to figure out what the hell he was up to. Then he cast that blasting hex at the gas line. Next thing I know I'm crashing into a wall. And he's disappearing down the hole he made and into the London sewers as a rat and it was one of those laugh or die crying moments. I was hit by the aurors two seconds later. Next thing I know I'm being chucked into a cell in Azkaban."

"So, you're saying it was all Peter Pettigrew? That's awfully convenient, since no one has seen more than his finger since that hex hit the gas line."

"Priori my wand. The last spell I cast was an expelliarmus and before that were a bunch of locator spells as I was hunting Peter. Shoulda reductoed the bastard on principle. He fired the exploso that caused the explosion that killed and maimed all those muggles."

"Would you be willing to testify to what you just told me under Veritaserum?"

"Definitely."

"Then Mr. Black, I think I can just about guarantee that you'll be a free man in a short time. What about the use of magic in front of muggles charge?"

Sirius couldn't help it. He winced.

"I see. Well you've given me plenty to work with. I'll make arrangements for a different robe before the trial, in the meantime is there anything I can get for you?"

"Something to read? Maybe some parchment and a quill so I could write a letter or two." Sirius couldn't help himself. This had to be a dream. Tears spilled out of his eyes.

"I'll see what I can do." Mr Fawcett got up and left the cell. Sirius laid back on the bed and tried to stop his tears, twenty minutes later he was still crying.

Nymphadora Tonks couldn't take it. She had never quite believed the stories about how evil her favorite cousin was. She remembered all the times he took her for ice cream to allow her parents time together while she was young. Now he was here, no longer in Azkaban, about to face trial which she hoped meant he would get cleared. And he was crying. She asked Ferguson if she could get a medi-witch or even just a potion to calm him.

Ferguson frowned but nodded. Black had been in maximum security in Azkaban for over a decade. Usually only lifers were in the maximum security. He personally doubted the wisdom of the higher-ups, but every Englishman had his rights. Their orders were clear: to protect Black from those that might try to interfere with his getting a trial, while at the same time keeping him absolutely under their control because if he was guilty they didn't want him getting loose and attacking the British Wizarding population.

A couple minutes later Tonks was back. She handed Ferguson her wand and approached the cell. "Mr. Black, here's a potion for you." He didn't get up to take it. "Mr. Black? Sirius?" When she called him Sirius he startled, then sat up and shuffled over to where he took the potion from her and drank it before handing her back the vial.

"Thank you, Auror Trainee." he gave her a searching look. "You look familiar."

"I should hope so." She gave a half smile and changed her hair from the sleek brown bob she wore on duty to bubblegum pink spikes.

"Nymph?"

"Yeah Siri, it's me." She said with a frown. "I just go by Tonks these days. How about you get some rest, alright."

He nodded and padded back to the bed. He awoke two hours later when his lunch arrived. The small chicken pot pie, broccoli, strawberries and custard accompanied by hot chocolate and tea had his stomach feeling full for the third time in twenty-four hours. He noticed his cousin was no longer on duty, instead the auror named Spencer and the black one were on duty again. The black one came to the bars.

"Your barrister brought these by." Sirius padded over and took the small stack of items. There was an everfull quill, about a dozen parchments, and a novel. "Thank you. Do you mind telling me your name, I remember you had just joined the aurors when... stuff happened."

"Call me Shacklebolt. The top parchment is a measuring parchment. I'll activate it if you want."

Sirius nodded.

"Hold it behind your back and turn away from me." Kingsley was taking no chances. His partner handed him his wand and he activated the parchment stepping away from the cell quickly. He had no intentions of letting Black escape on his watch. But even he had to admit that so far the man had been extremely docile.

Paige O'Shaunessey couldn't believe the offer in front of her. It would be the answer to her prayers and a crowning jewel in her research.

While she was technically a half-blood she was muggle raised and she had always known what she wanted to be, a healer of people's minds and hearts. Her mother had been raped by a wizard and had gotten pregnant. Devout Catholics that her parents were, they regarded the resulting pregnancy, despite the horrifying circumstances, as God's answer to their prayers. The couple had suffered from infertility; this child was theirs. Her magic had posed a sizable stumbling block for the couple, until they decided that the powers came from God and were natural for Paige. They constantly stressed to her that to honor the gifts and God, she had to use them

to benefit others. A life devoted to service was the example Paige's parents had set. Her mum was a social worker who worked with children and her dad was a social worker at a prison where he did his best to help prisoners reshape their lives. Both of them were gone now, lost in a dementor attack at the end of the last war.

Paige had, unlike many of her fellow Hogwarts students, worked very hard, so not only did she graduate from Hogwarts near the top of her class, she had both her O and A level qualifications and she went to college. To be more specific, she went to medical school. After getting a degree in psychiatry she proceeded to get her medi-wizardry qualifications from St. Mungo's. She had just gotten her medi-witch certifications when the last war began. As a mind healer her talents had been in high demand with the war. As the war progressed, she found where the mix of her education did the most good: helping war victims, especially those who had been exposed to dementors. She spent hours doing research mostly using her own funds.

Since the war ended she found herself doing a job remarkably similar to her father's. About half the time she helped people newly released from the low security at Azkaban and aurors who served there recover from the exposure to dementors. She served three shifts a week at Saint Mungo's so she could pay her bills, but most of her time was spent in her own practice. Apparently the work she did had been noticed, because she was being approached to give six months of care to someone who had spent a long time being around dementors. It was a research opportunity of a lifetime and if she did this perhaps she would have the information she needed to finish writing her proposal for prison reform in the magical world.

Chapter 28 The Trial of Sirius Black part 2

The day of Sirius' trial Mr. Fawcett arrived early and brought a woman healer with him. Sirius tried to flirt with her while she cast several charms on him. When she was done, Sirius donned the non-prison style robes Mr. Fawcett brought him. Nymph came and put shackles on him, keeping one hand on them. Mr. Fawcett also touched them. A moment later the three of them were whisked away to courtroom one via a portkey.

Sirius felt very intimidated: apparently he was being tried before a full Wizengamot. He was steered to the chair that bound the prisoner. He didn't fight it, he remembered Shacklebolt's threat and he desperately wanted his chance to speak in court.

"All rise. This court is now in session. Honorable Chief Warlock Cecil Warrick presiding, Court Secretary Delores Umbridge, Barrister for the prosecution Bartemius Crouch, Barrister for the Defense Jamieson Fawcett. The crimes of which the accused is facing are conspiracy to commit murder, doing magic in front of muggles, thirteen counts of murder, twenty two counts of battery.

The Prosecution started off by presenting the case. Sirius was relieved to realize that the case wasn't being tried by the current Head of the DMLE. Nymph had told him Amelia Bones was the current head. He wondered a little when Barty had been demoted while Barty made his opening remark. "Honorable Chief Warlock, esteemed members of the Wizengamot, today we are here to give trial to a man who has spent the last ten years and ten months in Azkaban for his crimes against his fellow magical beings. I intend to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that he is guilty of the crimes which he has been accused of so that he may be returned to Azkaban for the remainder of his days."

Jamieson Fawcett stood. He saw Stephen Corner out of the corner of his eye and smiled. "Honorable Chief Warlock esteemed members of the Wizengamot, I intend to prove a gross miscarriage of justice has occurred beyond any doubt. While Mr. Black acknowledges he did magic in front of muggles, he is not guilty of the other crimes of which he is accused. So let's get started." He bowed politely to the chief Warlock and the members of the Wizengamot.

Crouch stood and began. "For my first witness I call Alastor Moody."

After the battered old auror was sworn in, he asked him to show his memory of Black's capture via a projection pensieve to the court. He did so. Sirius had to admit to himself that Moody's memory was pretty damning. Because it showed the full chaos that surrounded the blast. It also showed him laughing maniacally and saying "It's all my fault."

"Thank you I think that establishes the battery charges and the murder charges. Now you were godfather to James Potter, were you not?"

"Yes."

"James Potter and family were in hiding when they were killed, were they not?"

"Yes, under the fidelus charm. Lily cast it, after she died it fell."

"Do you know who the secret keeper was?"

"Black, of course, who else would James have chosen."

Bartemus Crouch was positively gloating. When it was Fawcett's turn to cross-examine

he asked Moody, "I'd like to start with where you just left off. Were you privy to the secret of James and Lily Potter's location?"

"No."

"What proof can you give me that Sirius Black was the secret keeper?"

Alastor Moody hemmed and hawed for a moment, then said with a snarl, "None."

"So, you are basing your accusation, that Mr. Black was the Potter's secret keeper, on the reality of their long-standing friendship?"

"Yes." Moody snarled.

"Did you see the accused actually throw the spell that hit the gas main and killed and injured the muggles?"

"No, but he said it was all his fault. And he's a Black!"

"Is it possible he wasn't taking responsibility, but instead was blaming himself?"

"Objection, calls for speculation from the witness."

"Sustained."

"Let me put it another way, did he say at any point "I killed them?""

"No, he did not say "I killed them.""

"Did you do Priori Incantato on the wand Mr. Black was carrying?"

"No. John Dawlish took charge of Black's wand."

"No further questions for this witness."

"Redirect?"

"No, Chief Warlock"

"Next witness."

Bartemus frowned slightly but said, "My next witness is John Dawlish." he waited till John Dawlish was sworn in. "Auror Dawlish, you went through auror training with Mr. Black how would you characterize him?"

"Arrogant, full of himself."

"Who did he associate with?"

"Only James Potter. They were almost like twins, they could finish each other's sentences."

"When things went wrong, did Mr. Black blame himself or did he look for scapegoats?"

"Objection. Relevance."

"Sustained. Mr. Crouch, keep your questions to the topic."

"Mr. Dawlish, does your memory match Auror Moody's for that night? Perhaps you could describe what happened before and after the scene Auror Moody showed us."

"Alright it was pretty busy. Aurors had been going out and coming back a bunch, with all the celebrations things were pretty crazy. The obliviators were working overtime trying to keep the worst of the celebrations quiet. Then the alarms in the ministry went off showing a dark spell that coincided with summoning of muggle emergency services. Myself, Mad-Eye, and Kyle Brown apparated to the location. Black was laughing like a hyena. Mad-Eye stunned him and Kyle sent for backup obliviators. I logged the evidence and then the interviews that Kyle and the obliviators collected on site. We were there probably twelve hours before we were done."

Bartemius Crouch said, "At this time I'd like to enter into evidence all the interviews that were done at the scene."

"Copies of the interviews were given to the defense prior to the trial?"

"Yes, Chief Warlock."

"Any objections by the defense?"

"No Chief Warlock, but I would like to stipulate for the Wizengamot members that these accounts were given by muggles who may or may not have understood what they saw, and due to secrecy laws were obliterated therefore, they cannot be cross-examined and should not be regarded as the sole source of judgement."

"So noted. I will remind the membership during deliberations."

Mr. Crouch frowned but said to Dawlish, "What happened after that?"

"Not much, I'd been up twenty eight hours at that point. I came back, filed and logged the evidence as required, and went home. The next

week you interviewed me about it all during the tribunals and that was it."

"No further questions."

Jamieson stood up, "Auror Dawlish, just a couple of questions for clarity. Were you the only one who collected evidence at the scene?"

"Yes."

"You were the only person other than Mr. Black to handle his wand?"

"That's correct."

"What spells were done that evening? If you can remember."

"I reviewed my case notes two days ago to prepare for today. On scene we had residue from one disarming hex, a dark explosive hex, Moody's stunner, and multiple apparitions most of which was aurors and obliators."

"Did you do *priori incantato* to verify what spells were done with Black's wand?"

"No sir."

"Auror Dawlish, you know that one of the rights that makes us British is the right to a trial, yes?"

"Objection. Relevance."

"A bit of leeway if you please, Chief Warlock. The relevance will become clear soon."

"Overruled. Get to the point soon Mr. Fawcett."

"Auror Dawlish, did you never wonder why you were not called in for a trial before this?"

"I just assumed Black had pled guilty; since he'd been saying, 'It's all my fault.' when we arrested him."

"Thank you." Fawcett was pleased to see frowns on the faces of many Wizengamot members, and a scowl on Bartiemus Crouch's face. "No further questions."

"Redirect?" Crouch gave a negative head shake. "Mr. Crouch, your next witness?"

"I have no more witnesses."

"Very well, I'm calling a ninety minute recess for lunch and for members of the Wizengamot to read the depositions of the eyewitnesses. Court will resume and the defense will present their case at that time."

Sirius was surprised when his cousin, Andromeda approached them. "I brought lunch."

"Andi. I—I- It's good to see you."

"So you didn't get a trial before?"

Sirius shook his head no.

"So, you think this trial will clear you?"

"I hope so—it should, cause I didn't kill anyone. Andi, do you know what happened to Harry?"

"No, other than he got put with his muggle aunt. Other than that, I don't know anything."

"Petunia! But that's not right. After me, he was supposed to go to Alice, and if neither of us could do it he was supposed to go to Minerva McGonagall. She's still alive, right?"

"Alice and Frank were tortured by Death Eaters the night of the first. They've been in St. Mungo's ever since. McGonagall is still teaching at Hogwarts."

Sirius was looking very worried. Jamieson Fawcett noticed Stephen Corner approaching.

Stephen spoke softly, "Mr. Crouch looks as though he's starting to feel a breeze."

Jamieson smiled back, "It's going to get worse."

Sirius eyed the newcomer. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Relax, Mr. Black, this is Stephen Corner. He's the one who hired me to investigate your case." Jamieson wasn't going to mention that Stephen worked for Lord Potter. He had noticed that Azkaban had left Sirius prone to emotional outbursts and he needed him calm when he put him in the witness chair.

"Thank you." Sirius half growled. He was suspicious, but he obviously owed this man something for getting him the chance to clear his name. "If you don't mind my asking why?"

"A client had questions. The only way to get answers was for this trial to take place."

"A client huh? Does that mean you're a barrister."

"Solicitor, actually. I wish you well, Mr. Black. Enjoy your lunch." Stephen moved away. Like Jamieson he could tell that Sirius Black wasn't well balanced, but a decade spent in the constant presence of dementors could do that. He was surprised when he noticed Cassandra Yaxley sitting in the observers gallery eating a sandwich. He went over. "Cassandra what are you doing here?"

"Keeping an eye on things for Harry. He's more than a little off, isn't he?" she gestured at Black.

"A little."

"Harry kinda figured he might be, but he also recognizes that it isn't necessarily Black's fault. He's concerned that if Black gets freed, he may try for custody."

"How does he feel about that?"

"He doesn't want a crazy guardian. He's tentatively made arrangements with Paige O'Shaunnessy. She works with aurors and prisoners released from Azkaban, helps them deal with the damage

from dementor exposure. She did a health check on Black this morning. These are her recommendations. Get them to the Chief Warlock. They'll give you a leg to stand on, if Black is cleared and tries for custody of Harry. Harry likes things the way they are."

"Understood. It's strange, here I thought I was the guardian and Harry was the ward."

"What can I say? Petunia taught him to think twenty moves ahead. Harry is just trying to cover his hoops."

After the recess Jamieson entered the wand as evidence for the defense. He was pleased as many of the members of the Wizengamot looked sharply at Sirius, when it was revealed by a priori incantato in court that his wand didn't have the dark exploding hex that had been registered at the scene. He called his next witness, Henry Smithers.

"I investigated both the auror and muggle records of that night. In my investigation I found Mr. Smithers. Mr. Smithers could you tell the court what it is you do?"

"I'm a muggleborn who after graduation from Hogwarts in '54, went back to living in the muggle world six years later. I'm a medical examiner. It's my job to work crime scenes and examine bodies of the dead to determine cause of death."

"I actually worked the nightclub site ten years ago. I was assistant not lead on the scene, but I can tell you about the conclusions the muggles drew. Contrary to the conclusions the aurors drew, Muggles believe in conservation of mass. The explosion while hot didn't burn long enough to consume a full body. Although seven of the bodies were in multiple pieces ninety-five percent of those bodies were recovered, the remaining bodies were ninety eight percent recovered. That one body, Pettigrew, was less than one percent recovered, and by that I mean one finger, argues he didn't die there."

There was an explosion of sound.

Jamieson turned to Crouch "Your witness."

Crouch scowled. "Mr. Smithers, you say you left the magical world for the muggle in 1960, why?"

"Because by then I'd seen enough bigotry to realize I didn't like the magical world."

"I'm sure as someone who didn't do well at Hogwarts..."

"I graduated eighth in our class of a hundred and five, but you probably don't remember me. I was a rather unremarkable Ravenclaw, but I placed higher than you did with honors in arithmancy. After I returned to the muggle world, I took a couple years to catch up on my muggle education. I went to medical school, then rather than doing an internship and becoming a doctor, I stumbled into forensic pathology and it suited me. I started studying law enforcement. I graduated with honors from Cambridge."

Bartemius Crouch got an uncomfortable expression on his face as if something uncomfortable had been shoved in a very private place. "No further questions."

"Redirect?" asked the Chief Warlock. Jamieson shook his head no. "Next witness."

"For my next witness, I call Sirius Black. At his own request Mr. Black wishes for the court to use veritaserum."

It took a few moments for the veritaserum to be brought in, the stock number and maker verified, then for an auror to give it to Sirius. While that was happening Stephen handed Jamieson the medical recommendations Cassandra had given him. Jamieson read through them then looked hard at Stephen. Stephen nodded. Jamieson refolded then then tucked them into his robe to give to the Chief Warlock.

When Sirius' face took on a glazed expression Jamieson began.

"What is your full name?"

"Sirius Orion Black." His voice had the monotone cadence that veritaserum gave.

"Did you tell You-Know-Who the location where James and Lily Potter could be found Halloween 1981?"

"I couldn't, I wasn't the secret keeper."

A small explosion of whispers were heard throughout the room. The Chief Warlock banged his gavel for silence.

"Who was?"

"Peter Pettigrew."

"Why not you?"

"I was too obvious James and I thought it would be safer for Lily and Harry if I played decoy."

"Did you cause the explosion that killed twelve muggles and injured twenty two others on the early morning of November 4th 1981?"

"No."

"Why were you there?"

"I wanted to capture Peter."

"Why?"

"He betrayed James and Lily to You-Know-Who."

"Did Peter throw the explosion curse?"

Sirius' "Yes" overlapped with Crouch's "Objection! Leading the witness."

Cecil Warrington frowned "Sustained."

Jamieson nodded, and asked Sirius again. "For clarity, who threw the exploding curse?"

"Peter did."

"Tell me the sequence of events starting 4 p.m. Halloween 1981 until you found yourself in Azkaban."

"I got off work, went home and changed. I had a date that night I went on my date, then since it was late I went to check on Peter. He wasn't home. I got a bad feeling, so I went to check the Potters. James and Lily were dead. Hagrid had removed Harry from the house and was taking him to Dumbledore. I went after Peter. I caught up with him around one in the morning on November 4th. As soon as Peter saw me, he started yelling how could I do it, how could I betray James and Lily like that, I moved towards him and cast an expelliarmus. He dodged. He cut off his own finger and cast exploso fragmentus hitting the gas main that runs just under the street there. The explosion knocked me back and killed the muggles. My shield saved me as Peter's did him. I saw Peter transform and disappear down into the sewers and tunnels that run under London. The aurors arrived stunned me and took me into custody. When I woke up I was in Azkaban."

"You say Peter transformed, what do you mean?" Jamieson asked.

"Peter is an animagus. His form is that of a rat."

Crouch burst out, "Preposterous."

"I would like to remind Mr. Crouch, that my client is under veritaserum and incapable of telling a lie."

The Chief Warlock frowned at Mr. Crouch and said, "Further outbursts will not be tolerated."

Jamieson wanted the attention on Sirius not Crouch so he said, "Mr. Black, Peter Pettigrew was a barely competent wizard. Are you telling me he mastered a form of magic so complex?"

"Peter got an outstanding on his transfiguration NEWT. All the Marauders did. It was the only one he got. He only got acceptables in everything else. James and I had to help him, but all of us became animagi in fifth year."

"Alright. When aurors arrived at the scene you said 'It's all my fault'. What did you mean?"

"I blame myself for James and Lily's deaths, because I persuaded them to use Peter as their secret keeper. I blame myself for the deaths of all the people in London because I failed to stop Peter, and because I underestimated what he was capable of. But I did not actually kill anyone."

"One last question, many feel that because of who your family was you are a Death Eater. Were you at anytime, at any level, a follower of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named?"

"Never."

"I have no further questions."

"Very well, Mr. Crouch, do you wish to cross examine? Or has this farce gone on long enough." Cecil Warrington frowned at the prosecuting barrister.

With those words Bartemius Crouch realized he had failed to prove beyond a doubt that Sirius Black deserved what he had gotten. It had slowly sunk in over the last few minutes that in his zeal to punish Death Eaters he had lost his own humanity and put an innocent man into Azkaban. Not just low security where dementors patrolled thrice a day but into maximum security where there were always dementors present except for when the Minister did his annual tour. He had not just raised a Death Eater son, he had become that which he hated. He and Millicent Bagnold had both been vindictively angry and unreasonable where Death Eaters and suspected Death Eaters were concerned. Why had Albus not seen it? Why had he not stopped them? It was only after his son was outed as a Death Eater that the tribunals were stopped.

"Mr. Crouch. Mr. Crouch, do you wish to cross examine?" The Chief Warlock demanded.

"No."

The chief Warlock gestured for the auror to administer the antidote, then spoke, "Mr. Fawcett, do you have any other evidence to be presented?"

"No, sir. I believe Mr. Black's testimony speaks for itself."

Would either of you care to make a closing statement before we deliberate."

Bartemius Crouch shook his head.

Jamieson was pleased by that, it signified that he had won the man to his point of view. Now to make sure the Wizengamot saw it the same way. "Ladies and gentlemen of the Wizengamot, today we have finally heard testimony regarding one of events of the last war. A good man has paid an enormous price, ten years in one of the worst places possible. I ask that you do what should be obvious, set him free. Thank you."

The Chief Warlock called for a brief recess while the Wizengamot deliberated, and gestured for an auror to unlock Sirius' shackles and lead him to the restroom outside courtroom one.

After he left, Jamieson approached the Chief Warlock. "Chief Warlock, I wish to bring something to your attention."

Cecil Warrington read the papers handed to him, "I thought you wish for Black to be free?"

"I do, but at the present time I believe Black to be a danger to himself and possibly the public at large. Not intentionally, of course, but the man has had severe dementor exposure. I believe it behooves the Wizengamot to be careful and not compound the errors already made with Mr. Black. Free him from Azkaban, but see to it he gets the help he will clearly need to rebuild his life."

Ten minutes later the Wizengamot had reconvened for a verdict. Cecil Warrington looked at the people who had gathered in the courtroom again. He spoke, "Members of the Wizengamot have you reached a verdict?"

Dale MacIntosh, who had been appointed Wizengamot spokesperson, stood. "We have. On the charge of doing magic in front of muggles, and an additional charge of being an unregistered animagus we find the defendant guilty. On the charges conspiracy to commit murder, thirteen counts of murder, and twenty two counts of battery we find the defendant not guilty."

"Thank you. Mr. Black, the charges you have been found guilty of have mandatory sentences on the crime of doing magic in front of muggles given the number of muggles involved would be one hundred and fifty galleons, the crime of being an unregistered animagus carries a thousand galleon fine and a mandatory three year stay in the minimum security wing of Azkaban. However due to the unjust nature of your long incarceration, my decision is this: Time you have served will be applied to the mandatory stay of the animagus charge. The Ministry will reimburse you 84,000 galleons for your unjust imprisonment with the condition that for the next year you follow the care recommendations of Healer Paige O'Shaunnesy. Failure to do so will result in forfeiture of the funds from the ministry and the reinstatement of the mandatory fines. Do you understand your sentence?"

"Yes, sir. I think so."

"Here are some instructions from Healer O'Shaunnesy." He handed them to the auror serving as bailiff, who in turn gave them to Sirius. "I declare this court adjourned. Mr. Crouch, may I speak with you a moment."

Sirius was stunned the decade long nightmare was over. He was finally cleared. He could ... he

could do most anything. He turned to the barrister that had made this possible. With tears falling from his eyes, he said "I cannot possibly thank you enough."

"It's fine, Mr. Black. Stay out of trouble and follow the instructions from the court, that's how you can thank me."

"I probably should have asked before, but how much do I owe you. Your time, the robe, court costs..."

"Already paid."

Sirius was engulfed in hugs from both Andi and Nymph. Sirius found himself dragged to Andi's home and it was only there that he read his instructions from the Healer. Upon finishing, he felt furious.

Chapter 29 Halloween at Hogwarts

Harry was amused by Albus Dumbledore's disgruntled expression at the Daily Prophet's Headlines the day after Sirius' trial. "Sirius Black Innocent. Illegal Imprisonment by the Ministry. Who Knew?" He read the account of the trial and was pleased. Part of him really looked forward to meeting his godfather. He didn't want him to have custody of him, but that to Harry was a separate issue. He definitely wanted to know him. Harry also hoped that the headlines would pull Remus Lupin out from wherever he had hidden himself. Harry wanted to know both his father's friends but felt neither them was good and particularly trustworthy material. Sirius because he had felt revenge on Peter was more important than securing Harry's safety himself, and Remus because the man had been free but had made zero effort to contact Harry in any way while Harry was growing up. Curious about them willing to know them, yes, trust them, hell no.

Harry noticed three things as the year progressed, every time he checked the map to keep an eye on Lockhart's doings he also found himself checking on a certain Ravenclaw much to his personal annoyance. He had figured out the schedules of the first years because of where she was when, and it annoyed him to no end. So far none of his friends had picked up on his obsession and he wanted to keep it that way. Harry was barely passing Lockhart's class, Harry figured his grade had more to do with his refusal to cater to the man's ego than anything else, he was working extra hard in his other classes to make up for it but it was still killing his average. Part of him hoped the man showed his true colors soon so they could get rid of him before Harry found himself forced to speak with his Head of House. The third thing he noticed didn't happen until Halloween.

On Halloween he heard a voice on his way back to the dorm from the library. He had avoided the feast because he really hated how people the previous year had spent more than half of it looking at him and pointing. He really hated all the Boy-Who-Lived crap, it was like people wanted to rub his nose in the fact his parents died. Most of the time he could ignore it but for some reason on Halloween it was hard to. Then he rounded the corner and came across Filch wailing about Mrs. Norris.

Draco was there shouting, "You'll be next mudbloods!"

Harry was a bit surprised to see most of the second years there. He snickered as Tracey didn't think, didn't hesitate, she just reached out and smacked the back of Malfoy's head. Crabbe and Goyle, the two bookends whose father's were apparently enforcers for Malfoy, Sr., stepped forward as if to retaliate. Then they noticed Harry and Blaise and backed down. Harry knew what he'd done to establish his bonafides as someone not to mess with, and he wondered what Blaise had done that had served the same purpose. The teachers were trying to move the students out so they could investigate. Harry and Blaise took charge of their year mates, and steered the Slytherins back down to the dungeons.

He got back to the dorms and was about to take Hedwig out for the night when Cassandra used the mirror to call him. "Harry, could you send Hedwig to me, I've got a letter here to you from your godfather. I figured you would want it right away."

Harry looked at Hedwig she ducked her head. "She's on her way." he said as she vanished in a swirl of snow.

Apparently Hedwig felt he needed the letter tonight, because a second later Cassandra was exclaiming "Oh, Merlin!"

"Cassandra, don't freak okay!" Harry checked the map to make sure no one was near before he continued. "Hedwig is a snow phoenix. She can go anywhere in a blink of an eye."

"You have a Phoenix familiar. Do you have any-"

"Idea how rare that is? Yes, yes, I do. This is kinda one of those things I really don't want anyone else to know. Got it?"

Cassandra sucked in her personal desire to screech like a fan girl about this, and instead uttered, "Understood." She handed the message to Hedwig who promptly vanished in another swirl of snow. "What have you found out about Hedwig's type of phoenix?"

"Not much. I've checked the library but there's only three quasi-references to a mythical variety of phoenixes called snow phoenixes. Given Hedwig's ability to masquerade as a owl, I wonder if they all hide that way."

"Maybe you should ask Mr. Flamel."

"Thanks, I think I will." Hedwig reappeared next to Harry and gave him his letter.

"Goodnight, Harry."

"Thanks, Cassandra." Harry carried Hedwig the rest of the way outside then returned to his dorm.

Harry had pulled out the box from his parents and sealed his curtains around his bed before he opened the letter.

Bambi,

I'm unsure how to start this really so I guess I'll just say sorry I screwed up. I didn't expect Peter to do what he did and as result I didn't keep my promises to your parents. I'm sorry.

I was very upset when I found out that the Wizengamot insisted that I get a month of care from a qualified healer before I'm even allowed to meet you. I've got one more week to go then I thought I could come to Hogwarts. I figure if I'm ever going to get the chance to keep my promises to you and your parents I have to do what the Wizengamot wants. Sorry.

My healer says she's impressed because I'm not as bad as she expected. I spent a lot of hours as Padfoot because as a dog instead of a person the dementors didn't bother me as much. It also helped that I had a rational if unhappy thought on which to focus. She wants me to talk about crap like what memories the dementors brought up. Like I'm stupid enough to tell her. Anyway. I look forward to seeing you in a week.

Your godfather, Sirius

Harry sighed it sounded like Sirius was resistant to the idea of getting help. That made Harry feel sad, because if anyone needed help it was his godfather. Spending ten years locked in your worst memories would be horrible, Harry wondered what his would be, would it be the deaths of his parents or would it be the day Dudley shoved him down the stairs. He took a deep breath and slowly did a brief meditation to clear his mind of the agitation he felt. He folded

the letter and tucked it into the box from his parents. Then he went to sleep.

It was Saturday morning and Harry could feel himself practically vibrating with nerves. If meeting his godfather today wasn't enough, today was the opening match for the Quidditch cup, Gryffindor versus Slytherin.

Neville had teased him, yesterday that Gryffindor would slam the snakes. Harry just laughed and said "You wish."

Harry was confident because the Slytherin team was tight. Marcus said Harry was the best seeker he'd seen since Charlie Weasley of Gryffindor. Harry had every intention of asking his godfather to stay and watch the game. Harry ate a sketchy breakfast early then headed to the family visiting rooms. His timing was good he had only been in the room a few minutes when Professor McGonagall showed him his godfather in.

Harry felt shocked when Sirius rushed up and hugged him. He'd have thought a handshake was more appropriate, but he allowed the embrace.

"Bambi, you look so much like your father. You've grown so much. And your mother's eyes...I'm so sorry." He burst into tears.

Harry felt that his godfather really needed a calming draught, but was been held too tightly to go find one. He patted him and did his best to calm the man with his words. "It's okay...it'll be alright...I forgive you..." Finally twenty minutes later the man seemed to calm a bit.

It was at that moment that the color of the robes that Harry was wearing sunk in, and disaster occurred. "What sort of prank are you preparing for Harry? It must be good if you're trying to frame the Snakes."

"What?"

"Well there's no other reason I can think of for James Potter's son to be dressed like a Slytherin."

"I'm in Slytherin."

"You're a slimy snake!" Sirius' tones rang with disbelief.

Harry froze, and he gave a clipped and annoyed, "Yes."

"I can't believe it, James must be rolling in his grave. His son is a sneaky, conniving, cowardly Slytherin!"

Harry rapidly pulled free of his godfather. "If that's the way you feel, we're done here. I have someplace else to be." He walked with full dignity out of the visiting room and down the hall to the front doors. Then he could no longer control the urge to run. He headed for the locker room and the pitch. Halfway there tears started rolling down his face, it had been bad when Snape had said that the previous year, but it was ten times worse hearing it from his godfather, who was supposed to love him. Harry changed and took his broom to the pitch where he stayed up in the air until it was time for the game to start.

Marcus Flint was concerned when he noticed the red and puffy eyes of his seeker. But under the circumstances he didn't want to draw attention to him. He resolved to ask about it after the game.

The game started off normal enough, the Slytherins had always played with an aggressive style. Most girls from well-bred pureblood families wouldn't dream of endangering themselves by playing quidditch, they in general liked to be treated as ladies and ladies didn't play a game where breaking more than a nail was more than possible, but rather it was highly probable.

Harry's teammates all started wondering what was up with their usually easygoing seeker. He was being very aggressive, flying through the Gryffindor chaser formations and distracting Oliver Wood while at the same time never breaking the rules of play. Harry found outwitting the Gryffindor beaters Fred and George Weasley was a bit of a challenge, but today was a day when Harry found the challenge to be exactly what he needed. He had nearly Wronski fainted the Gryffindor seeker, Dale Armitage, twice. Slytherin was up by a hundred points when Harry spotted the snitch. It was hovering about four feet off the ground near the Slytherin hoops. He dove for it, Fred and George could tell their seeker wouldn't get there in time and clubbed the bludgers in Harry's direction hoping it would slow him down. Harry just did a tight spiral and flattened himself against

his broom to avoid the black balls. The snitch took off across the pitch Harry gave chase. He sensed to was about to change direction and he could feel Dale just behind him. He decided to gamble and cut off towards where he thought the snitch was heading, if he was wrong Dale would likely get the snitch if he was right he would cement the win.

A moment later Harry felt rewarded by the feel of fluttery wings against his palm. "Yes!" his shout rang out as he soared skyward hand clenched in victory around the shiny snitch. His teammates joined him in a victory lap, before they came down for the end of game handshakes. Harry was careful as he took each Gryffindor's hand so they couldn't try to crush his hand in retaliation for the win. Suddenly out of the corner of his eye there was a flash. He turned and spotted a small boy with a camera. He frowned. He shook the last lion's hand then walked over to the boy who had taken the picture.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Colin Creevey." He said nervously. "I just wanted to take your picture to prove to my family that I've seen you in person."

"Alright. This once, as long as I get a copy of it too. I'd appreciate if in the future you didn't take my picture. I find the whole Boy-Who-Lived crap to be rather annoying and unrealistic. Understand?"

Colin Creevey looked torn between being overjoyed his idol had spoken to him, and as if he'd just been told Christmas was cancelled. Harry didn't have much sympathy though, and was overjoyed by the fact he wasn't in the same house as this little cretin. Fan girls were bad enough, fan boys were just disturbing. At least as a Slytherin, Harry wasn't expected to be nice.

Marcus came over at that moment and put an arm around Harry's shoulder to lead Harry back towards the locker room. Once they were out of earshot of others, he spoke, "Good game. I couldn't help noticing that you were playing, shall we say more aggressively than you usually do? And before the game, I noticed signs you've been crying. Care to share?"

Harry got a stricken look and suddenly felt like blubbering again, but he said nothing.

Marcus took one look and said, "Up on your broom, we'll talk up there. I'll go tell the team to head in without us."

Harry took off without another word.

Marcus jogged to the locker room and saw Adrian just coming out of the shower, "Adrian, you and the rest of the guys head in without me and Potter."

"Something wrong Flint? Harry seemed a little..."

"Yeah, something upset him. I'll try to get to the bottom of it before we come in. But you know him, cards close to the chest and really only relaxes up in the air, I figure it's better if I try to pry it out on the pitch instead of up in the castle."

"Yeah. If anyone asks, I'll just say Harry wasn't done flying yet, and you stayed with him for safety."

Anyone who knew Harry at all would believe those comments, although Harry's teammates all believed if anyone was safe flying by themselves it would be Harry. They sometimes joked that Harry's broom was an extension of himself, and that if he wanted to, Harry could sleep, eat, and even shag on a broom.

Marcus headed back out, and quickly joined Harry in the sky. The two boys made four circuits of the pitch before Marcus said, "Spill it out before it eats you alive."

"You remember that time last year when Snape was such a total bastard?"

Marcus could remember many points last year that he felt could be described that way. "Which one?"

"The one when he was going off on my dad, saying I would be such a disappointment, blah, he'd be ashamed because I'm a snake, blah, he'd be rolling in his grave because I wasn't a lion, blah, buh, blah, buh, blah, blah, blah."

Marcus couldn't help it he smirked. Trust Harry to blow off a chewing out by their Head of House in such a cavalier fashion. "Oh that one, yeah."

"You know how my godfather got cleared?"

"Yeah, it's been in the news."

"Well same speech, different source and point of view."

"What?"

"Yeah," Harry's voice took on a slightly hysterical note. "I get the jerk out of prison, see to it he gets some help so hopefully he comes out of all this sane, and what does he do the moment he realizes I'm not a lion like my forebears? He tells me, my dad would be rolling in his grave over the fact I'm a Slytherin. I chose to be a snake... I, so, don't need this crap."

Marcus watched concerned as Harry pushed his broom down in a sharp dive. For a second he was concerned that Harry meant to plow into the pitch full tilt, but the boy pulled up just brushing the grass with his toes. He watched as Harry put himself and his broom through a couple more aerial maneuvers that would have professional fliers green with envy, then felt a bit of relief as the boy leveled off and rejoined him in the sky.

"Better?"

"Yeah."

"Harry, I asked last year, and you said I had to be able to protect my thoughts. I talked to my great-uncle. He taught me occlumency over the summer. Why Slytherin, and why the dislike of the headmaster? My oath as a wizard, this will go no farther."

Harry 's expression said he wanted to witness the oath.

Marcus pulled his wand, "On my honor and my magic what Harry Potter tells me in privacy will remain between us." The glow of his oath encompassed him and his broom.

"I chose Slytherin because I felt anything else gave Dumb-as-door room to maneuver me into being a proxy hero, which is something he wants. In Slytherin, fewer people would try to force me into that mold. I didn't count on the Professor being an ass and under Dumble's thumb."

"What? the professor isn't under Dumbledore's thumb!"

"Marcus, shush and listen for a second, okay?"

"Okay."

"I know you respect Professor Snape a lot, but I'm fairly certain the man hates teaching. I mean what kind of teacher hampers three quarters his students by immediately denying them the extra supplemental books? I know that the smart ones get them for themselves anyway, and nothing stops the rest from doing so. But how is putting a potion on the board, and saying "make it" teaching? I'm all for experiential learning, but I swear if he didn't spend half his time scaring students and instead spent a bit of time explaining there would be fewer problems. I will say, he is good at preventing catastrophic accidents, but still favoritism in the classroom creates more problems than it solves. This school is rife with it."

"Snape's not the only culprit, Dumbles, himself, does it too. If you watch the two of them closely, it's obvious. Snape dances to the Headmaster's tune; he doesn't like it but he does it anyway."

"I don't trust Dumbledore because the man put me on my aunt's doorstep after my parents' deaths. He didn't ask, hell, he didn't even have the bloody decency to tell them in person, he just dumped me there. My parents had made provision for me, but the Headbastard didn't bother to see my aunt and uncle got it. He dumped me on a doorstep some time between ten p.m. and six a.m. Like I was a bottle of milk, never mind it was November and I was able to walk. I could have gotten up and walked out into traffic or been bitten by a rabid animal."

"If that's not bad enough, his so-called protective wards there, basically trap us there and there are coercive spells that make my uncle refuse to move away, and it has hurt his career. That's not all the wards do. They've also made my aunt and uncle infertile. He took away their right to have more children. He told my aunt it would

stop when I'm seventeen but muggles have trouble having children after thirty five. The likely hood of conception goes down like five percent a year and the risks to the baby go up by like ten percent a year. When I'm seventeen my aunt will be forty two, technically still able but at what risk? What right did he have to make that choice for them?

"Then there's the fact, they really had trouble coping with accidental magic. I stuck my cousin and three other people to the ceiling when I was in nursery school for interrupting me while I was painting and in my cousin's case bumping me. I was nuts about art, even then. Dumbledore bound my magic for the next five years. It felt like I was suddenly blind, deaf, and wrapped in cotton wool all my senses muffled, my energy ripped away. For that alone, I hate him. I was lucky, it didn't shatter my magic; it very easily could have. My grandfather's magic was shattered by a block. Plus with the block, if something would have happened shortly after it was set that threatened my life, I would have been hard-pressed to do anything to save myself. I was lucky. When I was nine, I had gotten strong enough that I temporarily breeched the block, otherwise my cousin and I would have been dead beneath the wheels of a lorry.

"Aside from the time when he prevented my family from moving and the time he came and put the block on me, I never saw Albus Dumbledore. In fact in both those instances he tried to make me forget he'd been there. He was supposedly my magical guardian, and he never made any inquiries into my well-being. It didn't stop his allies from spying, and taking advantage of me. I never wanted to be famous. The fact I'm famous for surviving while my parents are dead.. it bugs me. Especially when to me I hear others say the Boy-Who-Lived and I think of my parents who died. It's disgusting to me when others seem to glory in calling me that because it seems their glorying in my parents' deaths. Which is just sick.

"If my aunt was a different sort of person, my life with my relatives could have been miserable and something tells me Albus Dumbledore wouldn't have lifted a finger to help me. As it is, I feel woefully unprepared for the life I'll be expected to lead as an adult. Aunt Petunia has done her best but there are particular quirks to the hierarchy of the magical world, that I'm struggling to learn before people will think less of me for not knowing them. Thank Merlin, I'm in Slytherin. The other houses don't teach any of this. All in all, why wouldn't I hate Albus Dumbledore?

"Oh and there's the latest ripple I found out this summer, I don't believe it, it can be interpreted about a zillion ways. But if Dumbledore believes it, and I can't help but think the bastard does, I think he wants me to die in the process. He's certainly not doing anything to prepare me for it if it is true. Be damned if I'm going to lay down and die without one hell of a fight.

"So that leaves me where I am, pissed off and ready to scream."

"Okay, that explains the anger, but you're not one to cry over stuff you get pissed about."

Harry paled. "What do you mean cry?"

"Red, puffy eyes." Marcus arched an eyebrow.

Harry blushed.

"Harry, it is okay to have feelings. I mean, I know as snakes we don't usually show them, but we have them nonetheless. Do you want to tell me? You don't have to."

"My godfather, I don't remember meeting him before...he.. my father made him sound so great in his letter from my vault..." Harry paused and dashed away renewed tears. "I pulled strings and paid people so he could get a trial. The moment he realized I was a snake, he reviled me, told me my dad would be ashamed. He doesn't even know me and he hates me. I hate him! I ..." Harry's tears went from the occasional one or two to a steady stream.

Marcus felt terrible for his young friend. "It's okay Harry. If my godfather treated me like that, I'd hate him too. Let's just fly for a while."

Half an hour later Harry felt somewhat calm and controlled. Marcus and he headed to the showers. Marcus was quick because he wanted to join the party he knew would be happening in the Slytherin dorm. Harry lingered and shed a few more tears in the shower for what might have been. On his way back into the castle he was startled when Luna came out of the shadows near the stairs leading to the dungeons.

"Are you better now? Did the grumblebums leave?"

"Grumblebums?"

"Yes, before the match I noticed you seemed as if you had been attacked by one. They make my eyes red and puffy too. Hogwarts sure seems to have lots of them."

"Okay...? Can I say, I have no idea what you're talking about." Harry fought an urge to chuckle. Grumblebum, he supposed that would do as a description for his asinine godfather.

Luna's misty eyes met his green ones. "I guess you found a way to get rid of the dust they leave behind. I guess I'm going to have to practice more."

"Practice what?" Harry didn't know what was going on in this odd conversation.

"Flying. Bye, Harry."

Harry shook his head with puzzlement before he went down the stairs to join the Slytherins' party in the common room.

Disclaimer: NOT Blonde, Not rich, not living in Britain, initials are not JKR therefore don't own. Love the characters and the setting so am just playing, I get nothing but the reviews my readers give me. Authorship shared with Darkshadowedrose. Beta read by Alix33.

A/N: WARNING! CHAPTER CONTAINS NONCONSENTUAL MALE/MALE MATERIAL WHILE NOT PARTICULARLY GRAPHIC IF SUBJECT BOTHERS YOU THE SECTION IS OFFSET WITH ASTERISKS. WARNING!

Trust is a Relative Thing

Chapter 30 The Fall of Gilderoy Lockhart

Sirius was torn between overwhelming and contradictory feelings as Harry left the room. There was the pack instinct as Padfoot that urged him to go after his pack's pup, then there was his own intrinsic disgust with all things Slytherin that stemmed from his childhood.

For the last month he'd been under the care of Healer, call me Paige, O'Shaunnessy,. He'd tried flirting with her at first, expecting his perennial charm with the ladies to win him his freedom and although she was older than him it wasn't a huge gap. At first she'd ignored it, then about week three she told him to get over himself because nothing would happen between them for several reasons, the two biggest being: he was her patient and he was too bloody immature. Sirius took personal affront at that assertion. He took exception to the whole assertion that he needed a mind healer at all. Paige was seeing to him getting his physical health back. She had him on a regimen of nutrient potions, healthy food, exercise(as if he were a muggle) and set bedtimes with mild sleeping potions as if he were a small child. But she also wanted him to take calming draughts and cheering potions, which Sirius refused. He denied he needed them, he was pissed that she denied what he wanted, which was firewhiskey. She had complained that he refused to cooperate during their therapy sessions. Most days they sat there not talking for the full two hours. He didn't need therapy, he'd kept himself sane in Azkaban. He needed freedom. He had connived his way into getting visitation rights with Harry. And then this happened.

"Bloody bugging fuck!" Sirius shouted. Then he headed to The Three Broomsticks, Rosie was always good for a cheer up.

The next day Sirius woke up and his head was pounding. He wasn't sure where he was and he couldn't remember how he got there. He was sure of one thing however and that was he had never been this sick, ever, not even after James bachelor party. He wasn't sure what woke him. Maybe it was a sense of impending doom or maybe it was the tapping noise he heard. He wasn't sure he was actually hearing or if it was the little men with hammers inside his head.

He looked up with bleary eyes to see red hair and stormy eyes. He knew that face.

Paige O'Shaunnesy could tell by looking at her patient he was hung over, but she had no sympathy at all for the man in front of her. A month ago she might have, but he had cured her of that with his stubborn refusal to do any work beyond the physical towards regaining his health. And now to have done this. She had given him permission to leave the clinic for the day and he was supposed to come back by sundown yesterday. She had worried when he didn't come back. Early this morning she had made floor calls until she found him. She knew from the smell of the room Rosemerta had stuck him in, Sirius had gotten drunk, but she would make him regret having made that decision.

She didn't temper her voice when she said, "So this is what you do, when I trust you! Then you wonder why the Wizengamot insisted that you get some help, following your long incarceration. What happened to visiting your godson and then coming back to the clinic like you were supposed to! Haul your arse out of that bed, Mr. Black. You and I are going back to my clinic, and you are going to abide by our set routine which means a mile run on the path."

Sirius cringed, between Paige's voice echoing and the thought of running on the path in the morning sun he felt sick.

"Haul arse, mister! You've already wasted two hours of my morning by making me track you down, and then there's the matter of the sleep I lost worrying over your sorry arse."

"Can I at least have a hangover potion?"

"Hell no! I believe today will come under the heading of living with the consequences of a bad decision. Something tells me you haven't had that lesson nearly enough, if you still do fool things like

get drunk. After your run, we'll discuss how the visit with your godson went."

Sirius felt his stomach lurch twice once as he found his feet, and again as he thought about Bambi.

The Monday morning after the quidditch match, the lions' table seemed unusually upset. Harry was concerned because Neville hadn't showed for their morning workout. It was later in the library that Harry learned the Creevey boy was in the infirmary in the same state as Filch's cat. Harry got antsy and wondered what if anything the teachers were doing about the situation.

Hermione speculated. "I wonder if this has anything to do with the Chamber of Secrets."

"The what?" Harry asked.

"The Chamber of Secrets, I asked Binns about it following what happened with Mrs. Norris on Halloween. Legend had it Salazar Slytherin had a secret chamber someplace in Hogwarts where he stashed a monster. Salazar always wanted to be selective about students, he only wanted those from magical families. Given the superstitions of the time I can't blame him. Rumor had it only his heir would be able to open the chamber and unleash the horror within."

Harry and Neville's eyes met. Neville arched a curious eyebrow. Harry frowned but gave him a negative head shake. Neville nodded reassured.

"So the mystery is who is Slytherin heir? What are his or her goals?" Blaise asked.

"Shouldn't we leave this to the teachers?" asked Daphne.

"Daphne, think," said Tracey, "first attack, Mrs. Norris, Halloween. The teachers had a week. What have they done?"

"Nothing, at least, nothing we can see." Michael stated.

"I prefer to be proactive. The more heads trying to solve this, the sooner and safer we'll all be." Harry said. "So who could be Slytherin's heir? Next question is, what kind of creature? What we

know is, it can petrify people and animals. Is there anything specific to Slytherin that might influence the type of creature? I know he's associated with snakes. Is there some magical ability out there we should be looking for that might allow him control? What else can we think of to help puzzle this out?"

Hermione pulled out a fresh piece of parchment, and the group brainstormed a list of questions.

Harry smiled as his friends- the best and brightest of his Hogwarts year- worked together to come up with questions that might help them solve the mystery of Slytherin's Heir and Monster. He grinned even bigger when Neville added to the question list, "If there is a magical ability allowing control of the creature, is there another person who has the ability, that would be willing to help us?"

Ernie MacMillian asked, "Has the chamber ever been open before?"

Harry was starting to believe that maybe he was mistaken about Lockhart's predilections. The map had shown him having one on one time with several of the older students- both boys and girls – but as far as Harry was concerned if they were of age, they were old enough to face the consequences of being stupid with a git like Lockhart. He always watched him like a hawk during class. Lockhart for the last two weeks had seemingly settled for just calling on his favorites in his class. His favorites being Millicent Bullstrode, Megan Jones and Draco Malfoy.

Part of Harry pitied Draco Malfoy. A good-looking son of a highly connected and wealthy man, Draco had come to Hogwarts with certain expectations. That he too would have influence and would do well were definitely among them, that his father also had that expectation was also clear. Draco really was a product of his upbringing: he'd never learned to work and had been spoiled since birth. It didn't help his family was prejudiced too. Unfortunately for Draco his ability to actually perform was below his father's expectations. It didn't help that he was up against a measuring stick that included Harry and Hermione Granger. Harry knew his capabilities in terms of sheer power put him in the top two percent school wide if not the top. Hermione, though lacking magical power, was there as well just from sheer brain power. Looking at the other years, Harry was certain Draco would have fared better had his class been a normal Hogwarts class year. Instead it had Harry and

Hermione Granger who skewed it hard to the high end of the spectrum. Last year had forced Draco to see that his father couldn't give him everything, but Draco was still young and naïve enough to think if he kissed up to the right people he would get what he felt he deserved without having to work for it.

The Slytherin gossip grapevine had it that Draco had had a very rough summer due to his father's disappointment, and Draco's failure to make a starting position on the quidditch team hadn't helped. Harry noticed that Lockhart had been giving the boy lots of ego strokes and it concerned him. Lockhart wasn't the type to praise or give credit to others unless something was in it for him.

Harry had tried a week ago to warn his housemates again.

Draco had brushed him off saying, "Get lost, Potter. You're just jealous that someone famous ignores you. Not everyone thinks you're perfect."

Millicent had a different reaction, she looked at him with her protrudent brown eyes, then said, "I'll be careful."

November proceeded into December, and Harry made his plans for the holiday. Lady Longbottom was having another Christmas Eve Ball and house party although the house party was only three days instead of a week this time. The Davies were hosting a solstice dinner. Harry was again staying in Potter Place between parties. Harry was also invited to a New Year's Eve Ball by the Greengrass' and a New Year's Day tea the MacMillians.

The study group was busy both with their classes and the question list they had generated. They had found out via Michael's grandmother that the chamber was rumored to have been opened about fifty years ago, a student had died, another student had come forward and said a third year had brought a creature into the castle.

Hermione had sweet talked Madame Pince into letting her look at the school chronicles: a magically self updating journal that noted what happened on a weekly basis that the people who wrote Hogwarts: A History used. She found out that the students involved: Tom M. Riddle, a Slytherin, who had gotten an award for special services to the school, Myrtle Millcote, a Ravenclaw, who died in a girl's toilet of all places, and Rubeus Hagrid, a third year Gryffindor,

who was blamed for the mess and expelled. The girls had volunteered to talk to Myrtle who they believed was a ghost, while Neville, Ernie, and Michael volunteered to talk to Hagrid, and Blaise, Harry and Kevin decided to research Tom Riddle.

The group was seventy percent certain that the talent involved was parseltongue, and were searching through bestiaries to generate a list of creatures. High on the potential list were lamias, nagas, and basilisks. In their morning workouts Neville and Harry endlessly debated the wisdom of telling the others Harry could talk to snakes both pro and con. All of them agreed to keep an eye out for any students acting out of character.

Then came the announcement that there was going to be a dueling club. Like most the students Harry was excited at the idea of seeing magic used combatively and he about died laughing when Snape handed Lockhart his arse with a disarming spell.

Lockhart got up, claiming it had been intentional that he let Snape win. He had suggested they pair off and practice a disarming hex. The room had taken mere minutes to dissolve into chaos. Then Lockhart had pulled Stanley Hopkins up for a demonstration. Stanley was a fourth year Gryffindor and a best friend to the MacClaggens. Snape suggested that Giles Mulciber would be a better opponent than Lucretia Tipton.

Harry was sure this was a bad idea. Giles was one of those Slytherins that Harry steered clear of. Added to Giles generally dark and controlling nature, was the fact that his Hufflepuff love interest had told him she could never be interested in someone dark like him, and she had been seen flirting with Hopkins; well, it was a recipe for disaster. Harry's instincts proved accurate as after trading minor hexes, jinxes and a curse or two, instead of the disarming hex, Giles threw a "Serpensortia."

Most every one backpedaled. Harry thought, 'how stupid can you get, summoning a weapon that you can't control.' Then the idiot Lockhart had to do it, he had to make a bad situation worse. He did a spell that threw the snake up into the air and made it land two feet from Justin Finch-Fletchley. Harry could hear the snake saying how mad it was and how it was going to teach these people a lesson. He flung a "petrificus totalis" at the snake, hoping the targeting drills Dan and Will had him doing counted for something.

The snake stiffened midair and hit Justin, who fainted.

Professor Snape, after verifying Justin hadn't been bitten, just hit, banished the snake. He awarded Harry twenty-five points for quick thinking and rescuing a classmate. Justin was given a calming draught and Professor Snape dismissed everyone to bed. As Harry left the room he heard Snape snarl at Lockhart, "Lockhart a word-"

It was the next day later after supper that Harry got his sense of something wrong again. Draco the git had been late to Defense today, Lockhart had been looking for reasons to take points from Slytherin since Harry had showed him up at Dueling club, as result Draco had detention with Lockhart.

Draco had been at detention for thirty minutes when Harry noticed a slight change in the position of the dots in the defense classroom. With Lockhart's dot practically on top of Draco's, Harry left his books and notes on the table in the library and ran for the DADA classroom. When he got close he fired an "alohomora" and did a leaping kick designed to take the door off the hinges. He figured the shock of breaking the door in would buy him time to disarm and possibly hex Lockhart. He really hoped he was wrong but what he saw as he came through the door had him convinced he'd been right about Lockhart all along.

Harry cast "Expelliarmus" which hit, sending Lockhart crashing away from his position behind Draco's tied to the desk form. His robes were open and Harry could see that Draco's had been removed. Draco's face was awash with tears. Once Harry had Lockhart's wand he said, "Give up, Lockhart, and I won't make you wish you'd never been born."

To Harry's surprise Lockhart pulled a second wand from his sleeve. "Do you think I'm going to let a boy like you tarnish my reputation? Oh no, you need to learn your place, boy! Obliviate!"

Harry ducked the spell and did what he felt would be the most effective thing; he took the fight physical. He moved to close quarters so he could control where Lockhart was pointing the second wand, and while holding Lockhart's wand arm he took out the man's right knee and then broke his wand arm. He followed up with a full force kick to the guy's solar plexus and another to his

privates on general principle, before stepping back and casting "incarcerous" with his own wand. He smirked as he realized the man's bonds included a gag.

He stepped over to Draco and freed him. Draco collapsed into a ball on the floor and cried. Harry called, "Wibbly."

"Yes, Master?"

"I need you to get Professor Snape, Madame Pomfrey, and Professor Dumbledore in that order and bring them to this classroom. I want one of the others to collect my belongings from the library. Go."

Harry looked reluctantly at Draco. He noticed the boy was starting to show signs of shock. In the end he shucked his robe, thankful for the clothes he wore under them and wrapped it around Draco and cast a warming charm. To his surprise the other boy latched on to his hand and wouldn't let go.

Five minutes later Professor Snape came into the class room. "Potter, what is the meaning of sending an elf after me. Don't you realize I have enough to do after today's attack on that Hufflepuff—What in Merlin's name!"

"Did Marcus pass my warning on about my suspicions about a certain professor?"

"He did."

"Fine, then hold yourselves accountable. Here's the git's wand, his other is on the floor over there. I cast all of two spells expelliarmus and incarcerous. If aurors need a statement later I'll be in the dorm. I would appreciate getting my robe back by Sunday." Harry tugged at Draco as he tried to pull free. "Let go, Draco."

At this moment Madame Pomfrey walked in. She looked around, "What on earth has happened here?"

Harry resisted the urge to say what does it look like. Instead he spoke- keeping his voice mostly calm- since Draco was still clinging, unwanted to Harry's hand. "The pervert over there masquerading as a teacher was about to bugger Draco who was tied to the desk. I

think I managed it interrupt before it got that far, but I don't know for sure. Any more stupid questions?"

Severus Snape was shaken down to the marrow of his bones. Marcus had passed along Potter's suspicions at the beginning of the year, but Severus hadn't believed that Albus would choose a teacher with those inclinations: incompetent, yes, pedophile, no. But here he was in a classroom with a teacher who was moaning and his godson was curled up in a ball wrapped in the robes of another student. "Thank you for interrupting then, Mr. Potter."

Poppy and Severus together coaxed Draco in downing a calming draught and Harry finally managed to pull free and was about to leave when Headmaster Dumbledore arrived.

Harry paused to greet the Headmaster. "Sir."

"What happened here?" Dumbledore was looking at Poppy and Severus hovering over a student and ignoring the man across the room who was tied and appeared to be bleeding from one arm.

"Long or short version, sir?"

"Short will do for now."

"The pedophile tied up in the corner tried to rape an underage student. I stopped him. Anything else, sir?"

Dumbledore was too shocked and appalled to say anything, as his problem child left the room.

An hour later the aurors had been called. Draco had been potioned to the gills and his parents summoned. After Madame Pomfrey had documented the marks from where he had fought the bindings and the bite marks littering his body, she healed him and he was able to recount the events of the evening.

OoO *****OoO

"The Professor gave me detention for being late to class . He was always so nice to me and he's given me detention before. He's always had me help with his fan mail. He has us sit next to each other and he always checks to be sure I'm comfortable . He was

always nice. He petted me on my head the way mum does. I thought he just liked me like a parent does a child. I came to detention." Draco paused and gulped.

Draco's breathing sped up. Almost hyperventilating, he continued. "I came in and he told me to put my hands on the corner of his desk because I'd been a naughty boy. I did as I was told. He bound my hands...he used a spell that took my hands from the close corners where I had set them to the far corner, it pulled me so my torso was across the desk. I screamed, "What are you doing?" Part of me couldn't believe what was happening, I mean Potter said he was... But I didn't believe it, after all he's a celebrity. He then said, I had been a very bad boy and needed to be punished. He silenced the door and locked it. He said, "we don't want to be interrupted, now, do we?" He vanished my clothes. I tried to get away. He just bound my legs. Then he touched me, rubbed himself against me, nipped me like my crup used to. I begged him to stop, not to do this, he just ignored me. He started to finger my arse...I heard him open his robes. He said, "Draco you're a naughty boy for tempting me like this and now it's time to take your punishment, but don't worry I'll make it so you don't remember it, it will make it all the sweeter next time." He kept one hand on my arse and was about to, to," Draco stopped.

"It's alright, darling, you don't have to say." Narcissa Malfoy said tears falling from her eyes.

"That was when Potter busted the door down, he disarmed him, but the Professor pulled another wand from somewhere. He tried to obliviate Harry. Potter dodged then moved in and started striking him. Lockhart screamed and out of the corner of my eye I saw him go to his knees then I heard a snapping sound, then he sounded like a bludger had hit him in the gut, And then there was a high-pitched yelp. Then Harry tied him up, and came over to free me and called an elf to get Uncle Severus, Madam Pomfrey and the Headmaster. He gave me his robe, he was wearing muggle clothes beneath it.

OoO*****OoO

"He saved me. I've been mean and tried to hurt him, but he still saved me from that..That.." Draco, despite the calming draughts, burst into tears.

Poppy Pomfrey said a simple sleep spell mothers often used for young children.

"Will my son be alright?" Mr. Malfoy asked stiffly.

"Yes he may have nightmares for a while but most the damage was superficial. A good night's sleep will do wonders."

Professor Snape escorted the auror to the Slytherin common room. He sent a third year to knock on Potter and Zabini's door to request Potter come out. The professor cast privacy spells on the alcove next to the main fireplace. When Potter came out, he said, "We can be private here."

"Alright Mr. Potter." the auror started.

"Lord Potter, actually," Harry corrected, " And you are?"

"Kingsley Shacklebolt, senior auror, Department of Magical Law Enforcement."

"Yes, Mr. Shacklebolt, what do you wish to know?"

"How did you know that Lockhart was attacking Mr. Malfoy, and that you needed to intervene?"

"I have in my possession a magical map showing the location of people within the castle that I inherited from my father. I have used it over the last several months to keep an eye on Lockhart."

"May I see this map?"

"No, you may not, as it is not germane to the events of this evening."

Kingsley wanted to argue but he knew with an inherited item and Lord Potter's status, he wouldn't get ministry backing to force the issue. "Why were you keeping an eye on Lockhart?"

"Last summer while I was shopping, he accosted me in Flourish and Blotts, I... discouraged him from attempting anything with me. But unfortunately I could not make the same guarantees for the other students. I did my best to warn others, sadly many don't listen when warned. Until now Lockhart played his little games with those old

enough to know better, and by that I mean the seventh years. But for the past month or so I'd noticed he was paying closer attention to Draco, Megan Jones and Millicent there might have been others in his other classes by I know from the map Draco was the first he cornered one on one. Feeding his ego and what not; Draco is pretty, young therefore vulnerable, and courtesy of his indiscretion last year helpless, an ideal target for a pedophile.

"Tonight I was in the library when I noticed Lockhart appeared a little closer than he should have on the map. So I ran up to the classroom, I did an unlocking spell and kicked in the door, figuring that would distract Lockhart. Once I was through I did an disarming hex. Lockhart had a second wand. He fired an obliviate at me. I dodged, but since I'm only a second year not an adult, I switched it to a physical fight, mostly because I'm trained. I got close so I could control where his wand pointed then I kicked the cur's arse. Once he was down, I tied him up, and saw to getting proper teachers there and covering Draco before he developed deathly shock. Any other questions?"

"No, if I may borrow your wand a moment to verify what you've said, I can finish this up tonight."

"Certainly." Harry passed the auror his wand. Five minutes later Harry was handed back his wand.

"Thank you, Lord Potter." Kinsley said and rose to his feet to leave.

"Anytime, Auror Shacklebolt. Good night."

Disclaimer: NOT Blonde, Not rich, not living in Britain, initials are not JKR therefore don't own. Love the characters and the setting so am just playing, I get nothing but the reviews my readers give me. Authorship shared with Darkshadowedrose. Beta read by Alix33.

A/N: Thanks to Isilithix for letting me know my asterisks didn't go through on the initial post. I had mixed feelings about the last chapter but it was necessary to the plot lines. If I offended anyone, and I'm sure I did, my apologies sort of. I did imply from Harry's POV that the older students should have been responsible for themselves, which is in line with his Slytherin viewpoint. He's twelve and it isn't his job to protect the students. He has warned both a teacher and the students via gossip grapevine as far as he's concerned his responsibility ended there. He made the exception for Draco because he is a housemate and in Harry's mind a stupid boy who needs protecting from himself. I do not believe that a victim in a sexual assault is ever to blame for the assault. By the same token there is also a line of setting yourself up for an assault by being unaware of your surroundings, the people around you/ people you are with, and by not being aware of messages you give off through appearance, address, and actions. It doesn't make it right, but it doesn't stop it from happening either. It's better to avoid such situations altogether by using your head and being careful.

Trust is a Relative Thing

Chapter 31 Return of the Wolf

Albus was relieved that the Christmas holidays started before he was required to have a DADA teacher. He couldn't believe that this had happened. It was doubly bad that the victim was the son of a board member. If he didn't already have enough problems with the Chamber being opened, but to have to deal with a pedophile teacher as well when the board was already scrutinizing him so closely. Albus remembered all too clearly that it had been the death of Myrtle Millcote that had paved the way for Armando Dippet's retirement and his own promotion. He needed to solve the mystery of the chamber, how Tom was managing to open it when he wasn't here, before the board could ask for his resignation.

He really didn't want to do this given recent events, but what choice did he have. He needed to fill the post before the end of the weekend. The board would have kittens he was sure, but Remus

really was an excellent teacher. Plus Remus might serve as a method to draw Harry closer to him.

Remus was surprised to get an owl from Albus inviting him to come and teach, for the remainder of the school year. Albus also sent him the last two months of the Daily Prophet. Remus was flabbergasted to read that Sirius was innocent and that Peter was alive but had set Sirius up. Remus quickly gathered his belongings together, thanked the elf that tended Black's Folly and apparated first to the English Coast then to Hogsmeade.

He entered the gates of Hogwarts with a sense of joy. James' son Harry was a student here now. Perhaps Remus would get to see him. He made his way to the Headmaster's office. He used the password in his letter to bypass the gargoyle and knock on the headmaster's office door.

"Enter. Ah, Remus, such a delight to see you, my boy!" Albus' blue eyes twinkled.

"I came right away, Headmaster. Is this a serious offer?"

"Yes, I made a terrible mistake when I hired this year's teacher, I'm afraid. In my defense there was not even a whisper of his ...sickening leanings when I hired him. The DMLE told me that with veritaserum they found out that he has done these kind of things many times but always obliterated the victims so no one ever knew. His exploits were similarly engineered. Lockhart has pled guilty to the charges brought against him and was sentenced to a year in Azkaban before being kissed instead of ten years followed by the kiss. Lucius Malfoy was pushing for life in Azkaban in maximum security. However to protect those involved this will not be spoken of, the students are unaware with two exceptions and we want to keep it that way. It should be fairly simple since most of them left this morning.

"Severus has agreed to brew your potion for you and the school will be buying whatever replacement texts you choose. That should have been our warning right there, I suppose, him wanting every student to buy all of his books. Here is a copy of the contract we would have you sign. I'll give you a few minutes to look it over."

Remus read through the contract, the salary wasn't as high as he would wish, but that was offset by the inclusion of the wolfsbane potion. The precautions for the full moon included a door of silver bars on his office locked by the headmaster or his deputy during the full moon. It outlined how many Hogsmeade weekends he would chaperone, and how many classes of how many students he would teach. After he read it, he signed it.

"Marvelous, my boy. Now there is something else I would appreciate your help with."

"What's that, Headmaster?"

"Harry Potter."

"Why? Is there something wrong with James and Lily's son?"

"Well, I don't have the foggiest why, but the lad doesn't trust me. He won't even look me in the eye. His sorting was a bit of a shock, I'm afraid."

"Where was he sorted?"

"Slytherin. Now, while I would be the first to admit that some very fine people come through Slytherin- Severus, being one such example- Harry being sorted there made many people nervous. That he steers so far around me, just adds to the concern."

"Maybe that is just the caution that so typifies many in Slytherin?"

"Perhaps. Anyway, I would appreciate it if you could make an effort to get to know the boy; build some trust with him."

"Slytherins aren't known for trusting others."

"Yes, well, Harry isn't exactly your typical Slytherin. He actually has friends in all the houses, and his best friend his age is Neville Longbottom who happens to be in Gryffindor."

"How does that work? Don't the other Gryffindors..."

"Neville Longbottom took on the most anti-Slytherin faction in Gryffindor and knocked them down until they couldn't get up, using fighting techniques taught him by Harry."

"Oh, my."

"That, my boy, is an understatement. Minerva was fit to be tied."

"Albus, I wanted to ask about the news in the Prophet was it true? Was Sirius innocent?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it was. I shall always regret I did not insist on a trial for poor Sirius."

"So where is he now?"

"He is currently residing in a clinic in the Welsh countryside a little ways outside Cardiff. Although he was released from Azkaban he technically is under Wizengamot jurisdiction for nine more months. He was released without fines on the condition that he get some physical and mental help following his long incarceration. His healer is the foremost expert anywhere on Dementor exposure. He has monthly permission to visit Harry, but their first meeting went poorly."

"Somehow with Harry being in Slytherin that doesn't surprise me."

"Yes, well, any help you could give me in that direction would be helpful as well."

"Of course Headmaster."

"Albus now, Remus, I am no longer your headmaster we are colleagues. So, I will see you on January 2nd. Have a Happy Christmas."

"I'll go to Flourish and Blotts and select books before the full moon in two days and owl them to you."

"I'll pen a note to Ebenezer. He'll take care of it and you won't have to owl me. Enjoy this time Remus. Soon enough it will be nose to the grindstone."

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

"Mr. Black, perhaps I haven't made myself clear. Either you will cooperate with these sessions, or I will kick you out of my clinic and report you to the Wizengamot for non-compliance. You can then go out and drink yourself to death or find some other form of suicide; the way many former inmates of who spent five years or more in Azkaban have done. Of course the ones that didn't drink themselves to death or otherwise kill themselves, usually found a way to get themselves thrown back in there; most often through losing control over their inner anger and killing someone, usually their nearest and dearest. So what is your choice going to be?"

"Fine," Sirius snarled. "What did you want to know?"

"Let's start with something easy. You visited your godson, how did that go?"

"Poorly."

"How so?"

"He's a Slytherin."

"So? What does that mean he's in Slytherin?"

"He a sneaky, conniving, coward. James must be rolling in his grave with shame."

"You told him that, I presume?"

"Yeah."

Sirius was shocked when Paige slapped the back of his head hard. "OW! WHAT was THAT for?" He bellowed.

"For being a first class IDIOT!" She snarled. "Oooh... You are...You... Who got you out of prison?"

"Jamieson Fawcett, he was working for a solicitor, Stephen Corner."

"Do you know who Corner, Davies, and Ogden's most important client is?"

"No, why would I?"

"Did you pay your legal bills or did someone else?"

"Someone else. What?" Paige was glaring at him and Sirius couldn't figure out why.

"Do you know who looked into finding the best care for you after you were exonerated? Who paid your bill in this clinic in advance?"

"No. I have no idea, I thought the ministry was paying for this."

"Your godson, you sanctimonious, thickheaded, prejudiced bastard. He has done nothing but help you, and you treat him like a pariah based on what house he was sorted to? I...I'm too furious. Today's session is cancelled, we'll resume tomorrow or maybe the day after. Arsehole, selfish, immature, self-absorbed bigot.." Paige muttered as she left the room.

Sirius sat there and blinked in shock. Harry was responsible for him getting a trial? Harry had paid for him to be in this clinic? Harry was concerned for his well-being? He felt as if he'd been dropped on his head. He shuffled to his feet and went to walk the path that wound around the grounds of the clinic. He had held himself aloof from everyone here, he had a sudden urge to change that. Late that afternoon, he was reading in his room when the assistant medi-witch that was on duty tapped on his door.

"You have a visitor, Mr. Black."

"A visitor? Who would come see me here?" he wondered as he followed her to the sitting room that acted as a place for family and friends to visit patients. When he entered the room he saw Remus.

"Moony!"

The two friends embraced for a long moment. When they pulled apart their words were overlapping apologies.

"I'm sorry I ever believed you would betray James like that!"

"I'm sorry I believed your curse was getting the better of you. That you'd gone over to You-Know-Who."

The two sat down and Sirius cast a privacy spell. The two then spent the afternoon sorting the mistaken beliefs of the past. As the sun set, Remus stood, "I need to go. I'll visit again in a week."

"I'd like that. Sorry, I can't be with you tomorrow night."

"Yeah well, you need to get well first."

"I'm fine."

"Are you? Are you really?" Remus' concerned look said he didn't quite believe it.

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Cassandra looked at the clock. She smiled she closed the file in front of her. Working for Harry was such fun. She never knew what he was going to have her research next. She checked in three times a week with Petunia, but because Petunia approved of the projects she was working on for Harry she hadn't been given additional tasks. The next two weeks were going to be fun. She was actually invited to both the Davies' Solstice Party and the Longbottom Ball and House Party. Both were considered the parties to be at this season. She was supposed to meet the Hogwarts Express in thirty minutes and help keep a eye on Harry during the winter holidays. She was looking forward to seeing both Harry and her cousins.

At King's Cross, Harry filed off the train he'd only managed to gift about half his friends on the train, so he told Cassandra, "Have a good visit with your cousins I'll be back after I've finished distributing gifts." then he disappeared into the crowd.

Cassandra took him at his word and cornered her Uncle and his family as they picked up Aaron After the standard round of " How are you ? What have you been up to since graduation?" Cassandra handed her uncle the results of her expanded brittle bone disease research. "Uncle, I know I am persona non grata in the family right now, and I'm fine with that, but I did some research for Harry." She handed him the expanded version of the research she had done for Harry. " Here's the expanded and defined for magicals version of the results. I think Healer Michaels at St. Mungo's would find it very interesting."

Aaron piped up, "Yeah dad. It's really interesting. I understand most the terms so if you need explanations I can give them. I think I want to be a healer in addition to a potion master."

His father groaned, "I can already imagine the school bills. Cassandra, it's been wonderful seeing you. Just because your father is an idiot, don't paint the rest of us with the same brush. Come to tea on New Year's your father won't be there but your mum will, at least for a while, unless you've already got plans."

"I'll do that."

"Great, I'll let Mary and your mum know. We've got to get going shopping to finish."

"Happy Christmas!"

"You too, Cassandra." Her Uncle led Aaron and his sisters towards the public Floo.

Marcus looked closely at his cousin. "You look happy."

"I am, Marcus, I am."

"I'm happy for you then."

"You know I have you to thank for this."

"Nyah."

"Yes, I do. If you hadn't called Harry over to help with my project, none of this would have happened. So, what are your plans after NEWTs?"

"Don't have a clue. Dad wants me to do what he's doing, but I would rather do something else. Dad's contacts are grey at best. I'd rather avoid that if I can, I'm thinking of trying to stay on an extra year at Hogwarts see if I can't wrangle something through quidditch."

"Felica Corner runs the estate management stuff at Corners, Davies and Ogden. If she weren't muggleborn she'd have been in Slytherin. One of her assistants gave notice that she has a baby due in July."

You got good grades in Herbology and Care of Magical Creatures and you've been a prefect, that could translate into a potential fit."

"But they're light."

"You're on good terms with Harry, that will help. Harry won't get you the job, but he can open a door."

"You really think I should do this?"

"Yeah, I'd like it if you didn't have to be under your dad's thumb."

"I would too."

Harry chose the minute to pop up by their elbows. He handed Marcus a gift. "I'm done. What about you?"

Cassandra looked at her cousin. She could tell he was mulling over what she'd said. "Yes, I think we're done." She leaned over and kissed Marcus' cheek. "Happy Christmas, Marcus. Come on, Harry, we've got the Party at the Davies this evening and starting tomorrow Barchok gave me a multi-use portkey to the Manse. We've got work to do."

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Remus checked into the safe house that a couple of werewolves used to be sure they hurt no one during the full moon. He hated such places, preferring the freedom of running the moors of barren places like Black's folly. It was the nights his wolf was confined without wolfsbane that his worst injuries happened. Remus had scraped together enough sickles for a magical replenisher, two healing draughts, and two nights lodging at the safe house. It would have to do for this months full moon. He had found four books for the classes he intended to teach at Hogwarts to use, he just hoped that the students didn't catch on to it that he was a werewolf. Albus had assured him that Severus had agreed to keep it to himself that he was a werewolf, but Remus was still leery.

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The next day Harry was feeling good. Potter Manse was beginning to shift from house to home. The public rooms were almost finished

as were the guest rooms. Cassandra's taste was excellent as to furnishings and color schemes. She discovered that his Great-grandmother collected paintings, not just the works of magical artists, but also muggle works. Cassandra had the idea of choosing one set of muggle paintings for each guest room usually by the same artist, then they agreed to refer to each room by the dominant artist thus the guest rooms were: the Constable room, the Gainsborough room, the Monet room, the Degas room, the Renoir room, the Cassatt room, the Vanmeer room, the Turner room, and the Bonheur room. She had coordinated the room colors based on the paintings that would be in them. Magical paintings by various artists were in the public rooms.

Harry- while talking to his Great-grandmother -found out that it was on a buying trip for paintings in Paris that his grandparents met. She had had the elves carry her from room to room through the manse as Harry spread the paintings through the house. She had been cold to him during their previous interaction but their shared love of art brought her around. She approved of the changes he had put into place during the rebuild of Potter Manse. She liked his idea to put all the family portraits into the study and library. He scattered the remaining paintings throughout the rest of the house. Except for hers which he put in the sitting room in the master suite which he intended to use as studio. The rebuilt three story Potter Manse had sixteen bedrooms, seven set aside for family, a nursery schoolroom, a conservatory, a ballroom, a dining room, two public sitting rooms, a drawing room adjacent to the ballroom, a billiards room, a study, a library, a dining room, a breakfast room, and a kitchen and two pantries, a potion lab, and a dueling room and that was after Harry had simplified the plans. There were also 3 small apartments for retainers and several smaller but comfortable rooms for the house elves.

Harry heard Cassandra shout from the foyer. "Harry, Barchok and the warding team are here to transfer the wards."

"Coming, be there in a minute!" He helped Bob get his Great-grandmother's portrait in place.

Harry jogged down to the foyer and after greeting the Goblins, he lead the way to what he called the keying closet. It held the foundation stone to the warding scheme and the controls for access to the property. They set up a quick protection circle then handed

Harry a dagger. This was his least favorite part in all this. He cut open the palm of his right hand and he smeared the blood across the stone while the goblins chanted. He felt the magic flow from him to the edges of the property.

Barchok had expressed concern when Harry had chosen this warding scheme from the Potter Family grimoire to add to the goblin wards but he had to admit it would grant the wards on the Manse the same strength as wards on some of the old family manors throughout England. It used his blood to call up the ancient blood wards. "Cruor dico ex vicis of vetus, cruor effundo protego nos totus, ex cruor adveho vires facio illa moenia." (Blood calls from times of old, blood shed to protect us all, from blood comes strength to make these walls.) The goblins sprinkled salt across the face of the warding stone. Harry pulled up as much magic as he could and finished the ritual. "Ex sal salis ut calx is vadum exsisto signum." (From salt to stone this shall be sealed.) He could suddenly feel the weight of the wards as they became active and staggered a bit as he and the goblins exited the closet.

Cassandra was waiting with some healing salve and a pepper up. Harry drank the potion but still felt tired. After bidding the goblins good day, Harry staggered to his half decorated master suite and fell into bed where he slept twenty hours straight.

"Harry, you have to wake up now."

"Go away."

"Harry, Lady Longbottom is expecting us in an hour and a half, so you need to get moving."

Harry pulled a pillow over his face and screamed into it. Then he pulled it off and said, "I'm up, ugh, my mouth tastes like dragon dung. How long was I asleep?" He felt an urgent need, but was trying to ignore it in favor of his assistant.

"Twenty hours, here's another pepper up. Zinna has a brunch going and she'll bring it to the breakfast room after you've showered. Show me your hand. Looks good, just a faint line left where you cut yourself. After the ball tonight put more salve on it, then no one will ever notice. Barchok told me to tell you good job. The warders examined the wards they are as good or better than the ones at

Privet Drive. You'll need to key me in or I won't be able to come back."

"Fine," as Harry crawled from his bed and into the bathroom. As he came back into his room after cleaning up, he noticed the elves had set out his clothes for the ball and a light flooing cloak and smiled. He really liked having elves who took care of him. As usual the part of him that took the longest was his impossible hair, he combed through it and was only able to get it to a lightly tousled state instead of just got out of bed. Since that was as good as it ever got, he went to the keystone chamber and the ward book. He had ribbon tokens that gave samples of the magic of each person to be keyed to the wards. Harry neatly wrote the names of Cassandra, Barchok, each of his trustees, and his family into the book Rubbing the ribbon for each person's magic on the ink as it dried. That task done, Harry went to the breakfast room for the brunch that would tide him over to the late night supper at the ball. Forty minutes later he was doing the pretty at the Longbottoms, and wishing the ball was already over so he could get some more sleep.

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Christmas morning Remus was surprised to see an owl awaiting him.

Corner, Davies, and Ogden

Solicitors

Dear Mr. Lupin,

Please contact our offices immediately. We have been trying to contact you for the last year regarding the will of James Potter in which you were listed as a beneficiary. We have attempted to send owls and contact you in person but you are very hard to track down. Our offices are in London, Suite 300 Farling Building two blocks from the Ministry of Magic. We apologize for interrupting your holiday but it was only after we heard from the Whispering Woods clinic that you had visited Mr. Black we realized you had returned. Someone will be in the offices the December 27th through the 30th noon to four and the office resumes normal hours of eight to six following the January 2nd. We look forward to seeing you.

Sincerely,

Steven Corner

Chapter 32 The Deal

Harry's holidays were exactly what he expected them to be, busy. He managed to stay awake until 10:30 the night of the ball. Cassandra had come to the ball but had gone home instead of staying at the Longbottoms', and was spending Boxing day with her friends. On Christmas, Harry barely managed to awaken in time to go to St. Mungo's to visit his godmother with Neville and Lady Augusta.

As such, it was only after they got back he opened his gifts. As he expected his family got him art supplies, a sweater, and a new pair of gloves. He was touched that Cassandra had gotten him three tickets to Les Misérables at the Barbican Theater. She noted in his card that she got the tickets for the same night he had gotten his uncle and cousin tickets to a boxing match so he and his aunt and maybe Neville could see it together. Her card said she had seen it and it was wonderful!

Neville, to Harry's surprise, had gotten him a sword set with a katana, waksashi, and tanto.

Lady Augusta and his trustees had paid for and signed him up for summer courses in beginner estate management, and basic wizarding law; to which he thought, "There goes my nice relaxing summer."

From the rest of his friends he got various books for pleasure or candy. Except for from Blaise who had gotten him a journal that would magically add as many pages as it needed for him to use it for a year and Hermione who got him a homework planner.

He was surprised to receive three books from Nicolas Flamel. One was a book about beginning principles of Alchemy. The second was a primer about the mind arts. The third was the one Harry found the most interesting because it was the private journal of a magical creature naturalist who had lived almost two hundred years ago. In it were his notes about a pair of snow phoenixes that he had found.

Harry dove into that book almost immediately after reading the short note Nicholas had enclosed.

Harry, there is very little information on snow phoenixes. But I found this at an estate sale put on by the Donniver Helegutas' family after he died in an accident in Canada in 1829. The Canadians buried him then shipped his belongings home to his family in Switzerland. They gave me the journal for a fraction of its worth, because none of them could read it. He was fond of the English language due to his wife being English and he used it in his work. I thought you might find this interesting.

N.F.

The journal documented Helegutas' work verifying the existence of the legendary creatures. According to the journal snow phoenixes, like their flaming brethren, had the ability to travel instantaneously from point A to point B, and carry heavy loads, had burning days(the fire was blue flames and were intensely cold not hot) and were effectively immortal. That was where the similarities stopped. Phoenixes were generally found in equatorial regions and were primarily fruit eaters. Snow phoenixes preferred cooler climates and were carnivorous. Phoenixes, when seen, were showy creatures, snow phoenixes preferred to hide in plain sight using camouflage. Harry found it interesting that the author wasn't specific as to what a snow phoenix's camouflage was. Snow Phoenixes did not as a rule bond to humans and were as picky as unicorns over who they allowed to approach them in their natural form. Only after he had sixty years searching under his belt had he found a nesting pair in Northern Canada. In the journal he voiced a desire to bond with one of the young in the nest. Unlike their flaming brethren who just flamed away, snow phoenixes were apt to get aggressive if approached especially by someone not worthy. Apparently the adults found him tolerable because they allowed him to observe them and even allowed him to collect a feather although once their young had fledged all of them disappeared. His journal gave witness to what could happen. He gave an account of a poacher that the adults killed when he tried to steal one of the eggs. Contrary to the legend of Beltharion which had inspired his research, he came to the conclusion snow phoenixes won't bond with wizards. All their focus was on their own families, and their aggressive nature made them self-sufficient. In this too they were unlike their brethren who if found in the proper stage would bond to most any good intentioned wizard.

Harry found he now had a new avenue of research and he found the observations very interesting. His innate cynicism had him thinking

maybe that was how the Headmaster had bonded his phoenix. His phoenix not differentiating between intent and actions. Harry speculated that that meant the Headmaster acted from the best of intentions but that his common sense was non-existent and his execution was even worse, the road to hell and all that. He stroked Hedwig in her phoenix form. "Why me? What made you choose to bond to me? Why do you tolerate being around so many others to be with me?"

She merely churred at him before morphing back to her owl self.

Harry had the feeling she had a self-satisfied smirk on her beak. "Ruddy owl." he said without any real heat to his words.

Lady Augusta had a slightly larger house party this year. There were enough guests that played quidditch that an excursion to a public pitch was planned. Harry's team won due to his sharp eyes for the snitch. He returned to the Manse and spent several days doing his homework or checking the family library for information on either his private research or the Tom Riddle research. It hadn't taken him long to come to the end of the easily found information on Tom Riddle. He added him to the list of people he had Cassandra researching. When the Hogwarts Express returned, the study group crammed into one compartment so they could compare notes.

"Hagrid swears he didn't open the chamber, and swears 'Aragog didn't hurt no one.'" Neville said as spokesperson for his team.

"Aragog is?" Harry and Blaise asked.

"It took some work to get Hagrid to spill, but apparently he's an acromantula."

"Good god!" Hermione burst out. "They're a class five dangerous creature."

"Yeah, and apparently Hagrid is keeping a whole family of them in the forbidden forest."

"Marvelous." Harry intoned. "What else did you find out?"

Neville continued, "I crosschecked the family library. My great-grandfather was a naturalist and studied magical creatures, so the

family library on creatures is one of the best. I'm ninety-nine percent sure it's a basilisk, seeing its image in reflection via camera like Creevy or in a pool of water like Mrs. Norris Halloween night results in petrification not death. Details about Justin are too sketchy to make any sort of determination. Spiders are afraid of them. I eliminated the lamia because not even Salazar would've been stupid enough to bring a lamia into Hogwarts seeing as they feed on children's souls. A parseltongue would be able to give directions to a basilisk."

"Well information on Tom Riddle is hard to find. He was Slytherin class of 1945 head boy, got an award for special services to the school; creature related two years earlier. But if Hagrid's pet was an acromantula, and the creature is a basilisk that means he told a few lies... Oddly he seemed to disappear a couple years after graduation. I've set Cassandra to investigating, she is actually going to do a full dossier."

"We have to tell a teacher." Hermione stated.

"I agree," said Susan.

Harry met the eyes of all the study group and Aaron. It was a clear and that the group agreed on that decision was in all their eyes. "Who?" Unlike his friends Harry didn't have blind faith in the authorities at school.

"All of them," said Padma.

"Okay, when?" Harry's question was immediate.

"As soon as we arrive. Harry you should be the spokesperson. You started the investigation." Hermione stated.

"No, Neville or you be the spokes person."

Neville nodded, while Hermione blurted, "But why?"

Susan proved her more political upbringing by stating. "Because he's Slytherin. The Headmaster and the Deputy are both Gryffindors. Wrong though it is, they allow more prejudice than is proper at Hogwarts. We can't risk being discounted because Harry masterminded this. Our age already works against us. Harry, I'll

write down everything we've found and send it off to my Aunt Amelia. Even if the teachers discount us, she won't. I told her about the attacks and she is very concerned, but doesn't feel that she has enough evidence of danger or political clout at this time to dispute the Headmaster's actions. She is working on it though."

Tracey and Daphne nodded as did Aaron.

"Okay, we have a plan. So how was everyone's holiday?"

The rest of the trip to Hogwarts was conducted in the fashion one would expect of twelve to thirteen year olds. Some left the overcrowded compartment to join other friends. The rest spent the time checking each other's homework, chatting about unimportant things, giggling and playing games.

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Remus Lupin felt unsure of the coming term. He also felt unsure about Albus Dumbledore. Years ago, if asked, he would have had no trouble responding that Albus was a great man and a formidable wizard. Now deep in his heart there was a question if Albus was truly as great as Remus had always thought him, or was he trying to maneuver Remus like a chess piece. The bequest from James could have brought him a lot of comfort over the years, but Albus had blocked the will. Remus had taken the bequest and bought the first new robes he had had since his graduation from Hogwarts. The rest he put away into a Gringotts vault, earmarked for wolfsbane once his contract as a teacher ran out. Then there was the fact that it wasn't the Headmaster who had seen to it that Sirius got a trial, no it had been Harry. Remus also couldn't help but remember that it had been the Headmaster who had discouraged him for being in contact with the only offspring of his pack claiming it was safer for Harry if there was no contact. Now Remus was left wondering who had benefitted the most from that arrangement.

He had long ago resigned himself to the reality that although he was strong both as a wizard and because of his wolf, he was no Alpha. James had been the alpha of their pack, with Sirius as his beta. Remus and Peter had taken turns being the Omega, mostly due to Remus' own non assertive nature and Peter's sheer lack of power and knowledge. With James' death and Sirius' imprisonment, he had fled in true omega fashion, and had done precisely as the

Headmaster had wished. He stayed away until called for. Leaving Remus wondering why, and wondering what had been the cost to his pack's cub, because it was hard to see the lionhearted baby and toddler of his memories as the calculating and cool-headed snake Albus described.

He stroked the fine heather brown wool of his lapel and checked his appearance in the mirror before taking a deep breath and heading down to dinner in the Great Hall. Hopefully Harry would forgive him and they could go forward and eventually have a good relationship. He wished that most of all.

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Severus Snape rose from where he had knelt to talk to Narcissa. He wondered what he would do. He damned Lockhart for a millionth time and wondered how it was that the bastard hadn't been caught before he came to Hogwarts. Sexual deviancy towards children was almost unheard of as was rape in the magical world. Sex magic being some of the most powerful and sacred magic; the idea of raping a fellow magical was taboo even in death eater circles. Although almost all young people were sexually active from an early age, magic in general precluded forced sex. Even muggleborn magicals were afforded the protection, sadly the same couldn't be said for muggle victims. Because victims of rape were so rare in the magical world, due to the fact that most individual's magic could, would, and did defend them from it; that mind healers didn't have any idea of how to help them. Most committed suicide either to escape the mental and emotional trauma of the attack itself or to escape the stigma of having been attacked. Which was what had lead to the current dilemma: Draco, although not fully raped, had come close enough that he was traumatized.

Contrary to the healer's assurances that he would be fine following the attack, according to his mother he was a nervous wreck. He having nightmares and refusing to sleep unless one of his parents was in the room, and he was jumping at everything. Draco also was refusing to eat and drink unless one of his parents tasted from his plate first because Lockhart had apparently fed him something that had interfered with his magic. Narcissa had begged Severus to help his godson and basically gave him carte blanche to do whatever he saw fit to do so that Draco could move on from the attack. Severus was at a bit of a loss however, because he knew that to make the

attack public knowledge would forever destroy Draco's ability to carry influence, if not destroy the boy himself.

Severus made some decisions. One boy already knew of the attack, and as muggle raised he wouldn't have the same prejudices about it that the other Slytherins would have. Severus changed Draco's and Blaise Zabini's rooming assignments. It was the only way he could think of to begin to solve this dilemma. He knew this wasn't going to be a popular decision with the boys involved, both boys having been antagonists last year. But hopefully since Potter had rescued Draco from Lockhart, Draco would feel safe enough in the other boy's presence to sleep. He flooed up to the infirmary to speak with Madame Pomfrey about putting Draco on controlled doses of Dreamless sleep so he wouldn't lose his ability to function due to lack of sleep, and about which version of calming draught would be most efficacious in this situation to quell Draco's anxiety. Other than that, he was unsure of what to do. He would teach his godson every spell he knew to detect tainted food and hopefully that would allow Draco to move forward.

He waited in the entrance hall so he could inform the four boys in question of the roommate change. He spotted Mr. Nott and Draco first. He quickly told both boys of the change. Nott muttered something like good riddance. Finally Severus spotted Blaise and the Boy-Who-Lived coming in together. "Mr. Zabini," he paused and forced himself to think Lily's son, "Mr. Potter, a word if you please."

"Yes, Professor?" came Zabini's smooth voice.

"I wanted to inform you both of a change Mr. Zabini you will be rooming with Mr. Nott, Mr. Malfoy will be switching with you."

"Yes, sir." Blaise Zabini gave his former roommate a rueful glance then turned to go to the Great Hall.

Severus was surprised when Harry didn't leave but instead leveled a gaze on him that reminded Severus of Lily. It was the look she had worn in primary school when their biology class was dissecting a grasshopper and he had suggested she do it. It was disgust, mingled with outrage, tinted with anger, and if Severus didn't know better he was certain the boy was trying to figure out the reason why he would do this. It occurred to him that it would behoove him to give Lily's son an explanation since he wanted the boy's cooperation.

"Mr. Potter, ordinarily I wouldn't dream of explaining myself to a student. However, since I wish for your cooperation and a lack of it may make the situation worse, I will make an exception." He cast "Muffliato" before continuing stiffly.

"Mr. Potter you are aware of the attack on Mr. Malfoy at the end of the autumn term. What you are not aware of is how such an attack is viewed by the magical world. Mr. Malfoy-

"I digress, I wish for you to swear a magical oath to not speak of the attack on Mr. Malfoy to your fellow students."

"I so swear, information like that is too personal to be spoken of lightly."

A faint glow surrounded Harry indicating to Snape that even without using his wand or proper wording the boy in front of him had made a binding magical oath. Part of him was astonished by the implied power but if he didn't want this noticed he needed to move on. "Thank you, I have made this change because Mr. Malfoy was more affected by the attack than was indicated by Madame Pomfrey. You already know about the attack, therefore if Draco has dreams about it it would be better for him to be near someone who knows. Someone, who because you played the role of rescuer, he has fewer fears about."

"What did his counselor say?" Harry was astonished by Snape's blank look. "Draco did see a rape counselor, right?"

At Snape's continued uncomprehending look, Harry was tempted to swear. "What? Magicals can fix broken bones but they can't counsel someone who was almost raped?"

"Rape almost never happens to anyone in the magical world, our magic protects us. As such rape counselors don't exist. Rape is akin to an Unforgivable. Hence Lockhart's sentence. Sex linked magic is almost sacred and for it to work, rape cannot take place."

"I hate to be the one to break it to you, Professor. But rape isn't about sex, it's about power. Power over another person. Bloody fan-fucking-tastic, so Draco has gotten no help in dealing with himself following what happened. Peachy-keen, here's another mess

dumped in my lap to clean up. I'm not in fucking Gryffindor, I have no desire to play hero for anyone. What is there in this for me?"

"I...I don't know." Severus was astonished, as the boy in front of him drew himself up. His response was so very Slytherin.

Harry contemplated for a moment. "I do. You will arrange for a teacher's meeting this evening. A group of us second years have been working the monster of the Chamber mystery, and we wish to present our findings. If we're right, we each get three percent of the value of the slain monster, fifty points for each of our houses and awards for special services to the school. Oh, and Hagrid gets cleared, he can get a wand again and his expulsion reversed if he so chooses."

"That- You say you've figured it out?"

"At least part of it, we know what the creature is. At least we're ninety nine percent sure. We're not sure who is behind it. We know who was behind it fifty years ago. What we're still working on is how it's being done now. Maybe after you adults have been spoon-fed some answers you can get your heads out of- You'll be able to figure out the rest instead of leaving it to a bunch of second years. We're the kids. It isn't our job to rescue the collective asses of everyone in this school."

"Any more language like that, and you'll be serving detention with me."

"Fine, I just find it a bit ridiculous that through using brainstorming, asking questions, and finding answers a group of second years is closer to figuring out what creature lies in Slytherin's chamber than a group of adults. Admittedly you all have a bit more on your minds, but still."

"I'll arrange it. And Mr. Potter, thank you for not blabbering about what happened to Draco. The current views on rape in the magical world more closely resemble that of the sixteenth century than the twentieth."

"Funny, I'd say that about a lot of things, not just the views on rape. Don't worry professor, I'll do what I can to help Draco, git though he

is. Who knows maybe I'll even manage to wake him up to the fact he is a git. What did they sentence Lockhart to anyway?"

"Because he pled guilty, it was only one year in Azkaban followed by the Kiss."

"Ah."

"Lucius, I mean, Mr. Malfoy was pushing for life imprisonment."

"So who will be teaching Defense, and are they any better?"

"An old friend of your father's, Remus Lupin, as to his competence I couldn't say, but I would advise caution around him there are times he's exceedingly dangerous to be around."

"Warning noted." Harry's face clouded for a mere moment of thought, before becoming inscrutable once more. "Anything else?"

Severus shook his head and Harry left.

Severus noted that the boy, well young man really, was unlike most of his peers. Lily's son really did blend well in Slytherin no matter how put out the Headmaster was about it. He was quietly canny, and played his cards close to his chest. After his initial qualms the Headmaster had been accepting enough. The boy's choices of friends had seen to that. Severus supposed he almost ruined things when he tried to force the boy to make friends in Slytherin, but even there the boy had chosen well. His friends for the most part being of neutral families from the last war. He wasn't perfect however; there were those flashes where the lad seemed to be channeling his deceased father; last year's stone incident came immediately to mind as did anytime the boy was on his broom.

He shook himself. He had better things to do than stand here. He cast a quick patronus to have Albus call a teachers meeting for after dinner. It wouldn't do to fail to follow through on his end of the bargain.

Chapter 33 A Basilisk?

Hermione Granger and Neville Longbottom approached their head of house to request a meeting with the teachers, only to be told that a meeting had already been called for following dinner in the Great Hall.

The ten second year students and one third nervously but quickly ate their dinners.

As the meal came to an end, the Headmaster stood and began to speak. "As some of you are aware Professor Lockhart left us at the end of autumn term. I would like at this time to introduce his replacement Professor Remus Lupin."

Harry couldn't help himself, he whipped his head towards the teacher's table. Then he studied the man who had been his father's friend. He wondered if this was the Headmaster's next ploy to try and "bring him around." There had been a few subtle attempts by the Headmaster to get closer to Harry last term and Harry had rebuffed him every time. Harry didn't trust the man. If the Headmaster wanted anything from Harry he was going to have to openly and honestly ask, with all the facts laid out. Anything less, and Harry would take great pleasure in denying the Headmaster his cooperation.

Harry knew from observation that the Headmaster wished to be the head of Magical Society. For the most part, Magical Society was willing to let him. Although Dumbledore outwardly denied it it was so, pointing to the Minister of Magic and the Wizengamot, anyone with decent observational skills could see it. When he had been head of the Wizengamot he had the power to stop the Minister of Magic, and Fudge had acknowledged that fact by bombarding Dumbledore with owls.

Harry thought magical society lived like ostriches, heads buried in the sand. There were the hardcore purebloods, the so called dark families, who Harry basically surmised were mostly stupid and bigoted. There were the moderates and then there was the "light". Moderates had to be careful because the dark families didn't trust anyone. Most moderates were from mostly pureblood stock, but most felt that freshening the blood was a good idea. Many of the "light" were all too willing to brand anyone with the label of dark even if they weren't really. The response to him being sorted into Slytherin

had convinced him of that. Harry had observed many of the so called light were just as bigoted as any hardcore pureblood. Harry smiled to himself as he contemplated how lucky he was that his chosen advisors all fell mostly into the light side of moderate standing.

Harry suspected that Dumbledore had intended to hold him up as the light's chosen successor. But Harry had no desire to fall into Dumbledore's mold. The old man was impractical to an extreme and seemed to hold that all could and should be redeemed to the light, right up until one of his 'redeemed ones' either did something or it was politically expedient to believe the redeemed one did something. After which the old bastard would look the other way mournfully, and allow the axe to fall. With his Godfather as an example, Harry had no intention of ever being close enough to the Headmaster to have that metaphorical axe fall on him. Besides Harry valued self-determination, the power of the individual, and independent thought he had no desire to lead the flock of brainless sheep that made up most of the wizarding world. Let them have their benign dictator, Harry would have no part in such nonsense.

Dumbledore continued his speech to which Harry only listened with half an ear. "Due to circumstance it has been decided that teachers will be escorting students to their classes, please for your own safety do not go anywhere unescorted. We are still attempting to figure out what is behind the attacks on the students."

Harry shook his head. Honestly did the Headmaster have no logic. He supposed it shouldn't surprise him that the man lacked logic; all you had to do was look at his actions. They screamed illogical.

Dumbledore continued. "The teachers and I will be having a brief meeting with some students then we will come back and escort you all to the dormitories."

At the Slytherin table Harry, Blaise, Daphne, Tracy, and Aaron nervously rose to their feet to follow the teachers, while at the Hufflepuff table Susan Bones, Hannah Abbott, and Ernie MacMillan and at the Ravenclaw table Michael Corner, and at Gryffindor Neville Longbottom and Hermione Granger did the same.

Neville came shoulder to shoulder with Harry and said, "I start, but I and Hermione expect you and the others to jump in when you have something to add. Merlin, what if they don't believe us."

Harry smirked before replying, "You're a lion what do you think?"

Neville gave him a dirty look and since he and Harry were the last two in the room he closed the door behind him. "Thank you Headmaster, Professors, for meeting with us. We, um, we were scared by the attacks on Mrs. Norris and Colin, so we met together. We came up with a list of questions that we felt finding the answers to would help solve the situation. We scoured the library, and other school records, and we interviewed a couple of people, er rather one person and ghosts. Because of that we think we know what the monster in the chamber is and we might know where the entrance is, what we haven't figured out is the who, the why, and the how.

Neville looked nervously at the teachers, half their faces seemed surprised the other half seemed very skeptical. "We started by looking at Slytherin himself; and the fact he was a parselmouth. So we made a list of creatures that ability would allow him to control, then we quickly eliminated anything non-magical. Which left us with nagas, lamias, and basilisks. We found out that lamias eat children's souls and we don't think Slytherin would bring one to a school regardless of how he felt about the other founders. Nagas' abilities didn't match. Which left us with basilisks, whose gaze turns living things to stone. We think that the creature is a basilisk, and that the reason no one has died is because they didn't meet its gaze directly.

"Hermione asked Binns about the Chamber. He wasn't very helpful, but he did indicate that it was thought the chamber opened fifty years ago. So we did a search through the records. We believe," he gulped, "that the previous headmaster made a mistake. If we're right and the creature is a basilisk, then Hagrid was wrongfully expelled because the creature he had brought into the castle was an arcomantula not a basilisk. He was not responsible for Myrtle's death. Rather we believe it was Tom Marvolo Riddle and that he lied to Headmaster Dippet and framed Hagrid."

"We believe the entrance is somewhere in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom based on what she told us girls about what happened when she died." Hermione spoke.

Professor Snape said, " Very well that explains the what and gives us a probable where, you say that you think this Riddle person was behind it fifty years ago? Parseltongue is an inherited ability surely we can trace his family." He found himself very curious about Tom Riddle. The age was right, was it possible that Voldemort was some sort of pseudonym?

"Tom had no offspring." said Headmaster Dumbledore. "You children have obviously put thought and effort into this. But Riddle was the last of his line and parseltongue is such a exceedingly rare ability-"

"Could he have come onto the Hogwarts grounds without you knowing, Headmaster?" Hermione asked.

"No I'm afraid that is quite impossible."

All the students but one developed downcast looks.

"Which leaves what, Headmaster?" asked Harry. Paying close attention to his tone he continued, "Possession? Did the school wards not get reset after last year's fiasco with Quirrell's possession by Voldemort to warn you of such things? You have our findings Professors. Now, how about you set a trap, catch the perpetrator, and bring in the exterminator before more students are hurt, or killed."

As Harry said the name, everyone but Albus jumped. McGonagall scowled at Harry's words. If he hadn't said them in a respectful tone she'd have removed points for disrespect.

"Headmaster, I'm sure if you ask, my Aunt Amelia would happily help you." Susan said.

"I'm surprised, you children did a very good thing in doing this research. We, teachers, have been so concerned about trying to keep you all safe that we overlooked the fact that by identifying the problem we could solve it. I think that you've all earned twenty points each for your houses." Professor Flitwick said before either the Headmaster or his deputy said anything.

Professor Snape said, "If, if their research is correct I think we should add an additional thirty points to each student, maybe even

awards for special services." He saw the pleased and sly half smile begin to form on Lily's son's face. "And since a basilisk of such a great age is sure to render many valuable parts, perhaps a credit towards their tuition say three percent of the value each?"

Pomona Sprout said, "That does indeed sound fair." She was thrilled that three of her House's students were a part of this group.

Minerva frowned, mostly at the five Slytherin students. But due to the approving nods the rest of the teachers were giving the idea, she said nothing. She had developed an aversion to Harry Potter. Mostly because it was extremely difficult to deal with seeing thinly veiled contempt coming from the face and eyes that reminded her of two of her favorite students. The boy was always on the surface respectful, but those eyes told their own story. She felt guilty and self-conscious whenever they were in the same room together. To have him here, pointing out the short-comings in the way the staff had been handling the problem with the Chamber's monster, it was as if someone had stuck something very hard in a very uncomfortable place. It reminded her all together too much, of the disaster surrounding the philosopher's stone last year.

Although part of her had started off liking Miss Granger, she now felt differently. The girl, while an excellent student, had fallen in with a questionable crowd, and had made no effort to become friends with anyone in her own house. It was unfortunate the girl lacked so much in terms of understanding the social realities of life at Hogwarts and in the wizarding world in general. Minerva was quite uncertain of what the hat had been doing sticking the girl in the house of the lions when she would have been better off in Ravenclaw.

Neville Longbottom had been a thorn in her side since day one. From his first term he was like a small splinter. He had originally seemed hopeless and he hadn't made any friends with his year mates in the Gryffindor dorm, if anything he'd made enemies. He'd squared off and made it abundantly clear that he was friends with Harry Potter, the bane of Minerva's existence, and she could like it or lump it. The sad part was, that the way things were going scholastically with the boys of that year group odds were when it came time to choose prefects Neville would be the top candidate.

Albus Dumbledore also felt very uncomfortable. He hadn't put much thought into solving the problem of what was happening to the

students. Protecting them, yes, getting to the bottom of how Tom was able to do such a thing, not really. He had been a little busy trying to consolidate his power after the summer's courtroom disaster and the ensuing fallout.

Albus wanted to hex Petunia Dursley for the way she had raised the boy. She was supposed to keep him ignorant and pliable. He hadn't really been too concerned for the boy; it would have suited him just fine if the boy had been slightly more downtrodden. That way Harry would have not valued himself over the good of the wizarding world, and would be more easily led by the illusion of a caring grandfatherly figure. Merlin knew he was a good enough actor to portray a kindly grandfather figure, after all it was his stock-in-trade. Also, Merlin knew James for all his arrogance was easy to lead, never bothering to question anything Albus had told him. Petunia supposedly hated the magical world enough that he'd planned that Harry would gravitate to Albus and those that followed him without question like Hagrid and the Weasleys simply because he was magical. Harry was supposed to admire him and follow his guidance without question. Harry was to fall in line with his plans and be the perfect weapon and assuming he survived, his successor as leader of the light.

Instead the brat's eyes gleamed with 'knowing' and he did as he wanted almost without breaking the rules. When he did break the rules, he did it for reasons that couldn't be argued with, and to make matters worse he often ignored Albus altogether. Harry's every look towards him screamed the cautious skepticism that had so characterized that last year with Lily. Even Severus was a bit at a loss when it came to dealing with the brat.

Albus was left scrambling trying to convince those others in power that he deserved his many positions and that he wasn't senile, and wondering where his plans had gone so wrong and what he could do to bring them back onto track. Thankfully the wizarding world, for the most part, was used to following his lead and not thinking for itself.

Remus sat and listened as the students presented in wonder. He found it very interesting to watch the dynamics. Harry was the youngest student of the group, but there had been a subtle acknowledgement by the others that he was the leader of the group despite his being in Slytherin. It was in the way they looked to him

for approval although Harry wasn't the presenter for most of the time, and in the way they positioned themselves around him. When the Gryffindor presenter, Neville Longbottom, finished, he had looked to Harry as he finished as if needing his reassurance. Harry had given him only the slightest of nods and a half smile after which Neville relaxed. If Remus hadn't been watching he wouldn't have even caught it. While Slytherin was the house of the ambitious, the five snakes all seemed willing even anxious to allow their fellow students the limelight, almost as if they were reacting to the suspicions and skepticisms that usually plagued those of that house. When the call for action was seemingly not being regarded, Harry was the one to get confrontational. He found himself agreeing with Albus that Harry didn't trust him, and found himself wondering why. As for what the students had determined, he was impressed it was well-thought out and well researched. He spoke "In the course of your research did you come across a way to kill the creature?"

The students looked at Harry for a split second. Harry gave one of them an encouraging look then the second year Ravenclaw boy answered, "The safest for who ever goes, is a cock's crow. But Hagrid has had trouble. All autumn term something has been killing the roosters. We think whoever is behind the attacks is behind the deaths of the chickens as well."

"Good. I think that all of you will be getting extra credit in Defense for this." Remus smiled as the students all got pleased looks. He was surprised that the solemn face that Harry had been wearing dropped for a split second and he caught a brief glimpse of the happy baby boy from his memories. He hadn't realized until that second that Harry wore a mask over his emotions. He resolved to do whatever it took to get to know the person behind the mask.

He noticed Minerva's expression and was troubled. He was very fond of his old Head of House and he was slightly surprised that she wasn't beaming proudly at the students especially at the two lions in the group. It was very rare that students cooperated with students in other houses. A group like this, with people from each House, ought to be encouraged in the spirit of cooperation. So why were the Headmaster and his deputy not doing anything to reward this? Weren't they the ones always saying that everyone needed to work together? Puzzled he stood and followed the students and his fellow teachers back to the Great Hall.

Later down in the Slytherin dorm, Harry mentally girded himself to deal with Draco Malfoy, git extraordinaire. He came into the room he had shared agreeably with Blaise, and couldn't believe his eyes.

Draco had been in the room twenty minutes at most and it was trashed. Draco's belongings were strewn all over the room.

"Okay, Malfoy I think it is time for some ground rules." Harry snarled. "First rule this...mess is completely unacceptable. Second, Hedwig, my familiar, is frequently in this room she dislikes mess as much as I do. You are not the only person in this room, acting as if you are will get your arse kicked. Keep your crap on your side of the room or so help me I'll burn it. Third rule blood purity comments will get your arse kicked. My mum was muggleborn and head girl in her year, it was doubtlessly due to

her that I survived Voldemort's attack. So verbally or otherwise attacking her, or anyone like her i.e. muggleborn will have me reminding you of this rule, forcefully. Fourth rule I will be polite as long as you do the same. Is any of this in any way unclear?"

Draco Malfoy gaped at Harry. Part of him wanted to kick and yell and scream "But I'm Draco Malfoy, do you know who my father is?" but he owed this other boy for saving him. He knew he was a slob at school, but he was used to having house elves and didn't have a clue about how to clean anything. Last term it hadn't mattered because Theo was, if anything, a bigger slob than him albeit Theo had less stuff. But it was obvious from Harry's stance and how tidy the room had been when he came in that he meant every word. "No, I understand. I'll pick it up." And he proceeded to do so. "Do I get to set any rules?"

Harry looked at him searchingly a moment. Then gave him a curt nod.

"Rule one. You can't tell anyone about what happened with Lockhart. Rule two, you can't go pawing through my stuff. Rule three if I can't say anything bad about mud—muggleborns you can't say anything bad about my family either. Rule four as long as I abide by your rules you don't, how did you phrase it, 'kick my arse'." Draco really hoped Harry agreed to the last one his father had taught him a lot of iffy spells to defend yourself with but those spells hadn't done him a lick of good against Lockhart. But the other boy had taken Lockhart

down like it was nothing, which left Draco feeling both safe around his new roommate and scared because it was clear Harry didn't make idle threats.

"Your rule one, I wouldn't dream of it. It's up to you to who and if you talk about it. Rule two, your stuff doesn't interest me, and as long as that's mutual, fine, no problem. Rule three, I can respect that. Even if I don't agree with your family's politics, I can live and let live. So rule four won't be a problem. Truce?"

"Truce." Draco continued to pick up his belongings from where they were scattered.

Harry watched but noticed Draco seemed at a bit of a loss at what to do with his belongings. "Don't you know how to clean up after yourself Malfoy?"

The other boy went scarlet. "At home I have an elf."

"It might be best to start by hanging your clothes in the wardrobe. After that as you look at each item think about where you'll use it the most and where it can be placed near there. If you assign each item a place and put it there every time it's not in use then you'll always be able to find it." Harry watched quietly out of the corner of his eye and read his primer on the mind arts while Draco put his words into practice.

As Draco put the last of his clothes away and got out his Puddlemere United posters to put up, he felt a small sense of accomplishment. He looked around his side of the room and reflected it looked much better already. He thought maybe having Harry Potter as a roommate wouldn't be too bad.

Chapter 34 Learning Lessons

Three weeks later the students were astonished when Ginny Weasley of Gryffindor was hauled away to St. Mungo's. As they lead her away she was alternating between sobbing hysterically, and growling death threats and blood purity slurs.

Harry wasn't sure what all her problem was, but he pitied her; mental healthcare being what it was in the magical world. Harry was having to deal with more than a little stress coming from other people's mental health issues. His godfather was wanting another meeting and frankly Harry really didn't want to. Being emotionally attacked once by the man was enough as far as he was concerned. It didn't help that by night he was having to deal with Draco Malfoy's whole drama about the aftereffects of almost being raped, and by day Harry found himself attempting to avoid Remus Lupin.

Harry had mixed feelings about the man. Part of him desperately wanted to get to know Lupin and ask him questions about his parents. But there was the cynical side of himself that said, the older man was Dumbledore's stooge. He hadn't bothered to ever check on Harry at the Dursleys . Lupin hadn't even ever bothered to send a birthday or Christmas card, which had Harry wondering if the man had to be paid to be in his life. As far as Harry was concerned if that was the case, he didn't need someone like that in his life.

The one place Harry couldn't avoid him was class, although he wanted to avoid the man it hadn't been long before Defense had become his favorite class. Remus Lupin may be Dumbledore's stooge but the man knew Defense like it was no one's business. He had taught the second years the spells to detect curses on objects and food that had been tampered with. Aaron talked about all the spells they were learning to deal with dark creatures. Harry sorely wanted to ask for extra tutoring since Professor Lupin actually knew the subject, but he was resistant to approaching the man because he was afraid of the metaphorical and psychological trap the man represented.

It was in this realm of a steady mental conundrum that Harry had his next encounter with Luna Lovegood.

"Lun-a."

The sing-songy tone reminded Harry of the kids in his neighborhood who had mocked him by calling him Potty before he learned karate.

"So, when are they coming to haul your loony self away like they did your friend the lion?"

"What I don't understand was how come they didn't take both of them away at the same time, especially given the way Loony here is always seeing creatures that aren't there."

"She can't help it, her father is as crazy as she is. My mum says it's because her mum died and she was there to see it. Her father was none too balanced before his wife died since then he's gone round the twist. Of course why she's been brought here to Hogwarts instead of a hospital is anyone's guess."

Harry came round the corner to see seven Ravenclaw girls, the oldest of whom might have been a fourth year and the youngest a first, surrounding Luna and pushing her from one to another. Luna's expression was upset and scared.

Harry's instincts screamed "protect her" so using his most menacing tone he growled, "Stop it. Leave her alone."

The oldest of the Ravenclaw girls misjudged her shove and Luna went past the girl who was intended to push her next and she fell on the floor outside the circle of girls.

The second oldest girl snarled at him, "Why should we?"

"Because one, it isn't nice to pick on someone even if they're different, and as far as I know she hasn't done a thing to you. Two because if you don't, I'll inform Professor Flitwick that he's got a bunch of bullying twits in his house. I rather imagine he'd see the lot of you in detention if not suspended. Housemates are supposed to support one another, not bully each other."

"Like he'll believe a slimy snake like you!" snarled the first year girl.

Harry noticed that the second year girl in the group, Lillian Moon, stiffened as she recognized him. He addressed the younger girl. "Twit, let's get one thing straight. I am not someone you want to mess with. If I can't beat you magically, and given I'm Harry Potter I

probably could blindfolded and wand arm tied behind my back, I can and I will beat you physically. Unlike a lot of guys who wouldn't dream of hitting a girl, I believe in equality between genders and won't pull punches when it comes to bullies like you lot.

"I don't know Luna very well, but I do know that seven on one is bullying. Which by school rules is grounds for suspension according to the Hogwarts charter. I thought 'claws were supposed to be smart. I would imagine getting suspended from school would be viewed by your families as being extremely stupid. Not to mention how the Professor will view it. Now get lost."

The girls looked at one another and decided to cut their losses. As they rounded the corner Harry reached down to help Luna to her feet. He noticed some abrasions on her hands and decided to take her to the hospital wing. "Come on let's get Madame Pomfrey to give your hands a look. I bet she's got a salve or something that will fix you right up."

Her silvery grey eyes looked at him. "The grumblebums have been leaving you alone, but the nargles are having a field day with you, aren't they?"

Harry remembered how she had described his mood after the visit with his godfather as being beset with grumblebums. He wondered if this was her mental way of coping with her mother's death. Far be it from the magical world to offer grief counseling to a young girl who'd witnessed her mother's death. "Nargles?"

"You know, they leave you stuck wanting to think about other things but unable to do so. I've got them too. Ginny isn't herself, she hasn't been since school started. We used to be friends, but now her only friend is that diary. Of course the grumblebums have been bothering me too. I don't think I like school."

"Well, maybe today will see some of the grumblebums leaving you alone. If not let me know and I make sure they get a more pointed lesson. Here we are the infirmary. I'll see you around, Luna."

"Thanks, Harry."

As Harry left the infirmary he pondered Luna's words. Nargles, he snickered. Based on Luna's description he definitely had nargles.

Perhaps instead of thinking in circles it was time to move his thoughts into a line. His grumblebums had been blown away by time on his broom. Unfortunately the weather outside the castle wasn't conducive to that solution for his nargle infestation. He really wished he could fly inside but rules were rules and he could see the logic behind this one. He went hunting for Neville but couldn't find him; he ran into Michael Corner first.

"Hey, Harry."

"Michael."

"Could I talk with you?"

"Sure what's up?"

"Have you heard anything from the teachers about the basilisk?"

"No, but I know that somehow Ginny Weasley was the one opening the chamber. After the teachers had declared Myrtle's bathroom off limits she went in anyway."

"That's just crazy. You just don't get a family any more light than the Weasleys."

"Well, there's always the possibility I put forth at the meeting."

"Possession? Well I suppose. It's just that usually for that to take place there's some sort of medium or there's some sort of obvious abnormality. At least that's what my older sister says. Ginny Weasley looked pretty normal as she was escorted out of the school."

"Hmn. Well that's not my problem. I was looking for Nev. Have you seen him?"

"No, but I had a question in Defense. Could you give me a hand?"

"Sure."

As he helped Michael through the problem Harry thought about his friends. Harry knew that Michael was smart. He wasn't top Ravenclaw but he had a solid grasp of Wizarding politics. Boot, who

was top Ravenclaw, was one of the Ravenclaws who, while book smart, was stupid in most practical applications. Harry had understood that Michael had initially believed the stories about Harry's reputation and the fears about his placement in Slytherin but after getting to know each other a bit through his parents, Michael had taken a chance and made friends with Harry. Michael was what Harry considered solid. He wasn't very noticeable in looks, intellect or manner but he wasn't a slouch either. When Michael committed to things, he gave the impression he'd have fit in the house of badgers. Harry figured the main reasons why he was a Ravenclaw versus a Hufflepuff was he was a bit too bookish and he was painfully shy. He hadn't said anything the first six study sessions that he had joined them at in the library. It was only Harry carefully drawing him out that had allowed him to make friends with the others.

The girls, well they were interesting overall. Susan and Hannah were easy to read, moderately pretty and since both of them were very easy-going it wasn't hard to work with them. Hermione, Daphne, and Tracy were a little trickier. The first because she was so book smart, but people stupid. The second two, well they were a bit like handling explosives. They were definitely handle with care. Proud and slightly high-strung they came from wealthy, well-connected families and while not in the same power or intelligence class, as himself or Granger, they also were no slouches. They both had the bone structure, striking eyes and complexions to be quite beautiful when they grew up, adding that to their other assets... Well Harry was sure they would grow up to be forces to be reckoned with. Uncle Vernon had always told him and Dudley never underestimate the power of a beautiful woman, and in Daphne and Tracey's case Harry didn't want to make mistakes.

Aaron was older and really only strongly talented in potions. He was ambitious, but also a realist. He knew his physical limitations. Last year they had been allies, but the research Harry had provided him on osteogenesis imperfecta had cemented their alliance into a solid friendship. Aaron often acted as devil's advocate for the group; a trait Harry appreciated. He also helped balance the boy girl ratio, a fact the other boys appreciated.

Blaise was the newcomer to the group. From comments he had let slip while they were roommates, Harry knew that Blaise didn't have a happy home life. His mother was on husband number seven. She

had wizard bonded her first two husbands, one of whom was Blaise's father. After his death she had only used civil ceremonies to marry Blaise's line of stepfathers. Blaise had a grandmother in Italy whom he loved and preferred to be with during the school breaks, but his mother was, in his own words a controlling bitch who liked to have the illusion her family was normal, and she did her best to keep them apart. She wanted revenge on the old bag, as she called his Nana, and so he usually only got a little time with his Nana. The only reason he got any was because of the terms of his father's will. His mother, although neutral in the last war, was dark; Blaise wanted to be anything but. That was one motive for his friendship with Harry; it was a way to reinforce his decision that he wouldn't be dark. Harry had no objection to serving such a purpose for his fellow Slytherin.

Then there was Neville. Harry had gambled that day on the train when he told Neville of their relationship, but the gamble had paid off in spades. Neville had changed a lot from the scared, shy boy that had first boarded the Hogwarts Express. He had gone from being unfit and overweight to a buff brick of a boy. He was confident. He always had Harry's back, or front when needed, Harry thought with a smirk, thinking of their presentation to the teachers. Magically Neville wasn't as strong as Harry but he still was one of the strongest boys in their year. He also worked harder than anyone except Harry. It was mostly due to Neville that Harry had built as many social connections as he had. Lady Augusta was synonymous with the light, but when one listened carefully it was clear she was a moderate and she was raising Neville to be the same. Harry was certain that if it came to a war, the Longbottoms would side with Dumbledore not Voldemort, but in every other way the Longbottoms didn't like or trust the so called leader of light. That made them ideal allies from his view. Although most Neville's housemates had trouble figuring out why he was in Gryffindor and not Hufflepuff, Harry knew why Neville was in Gryffindor. The reason was simple: when Neville had come to Hogwarts, despite thinking he was a squib, he had shown that at his core his courage was second to none. Neville valued honor and bravery, and he had an amazing work ethic, but he also had a bit of the charge forward without thinking mentality. Harry used his own leadership qualities to gently curb those impulses and to see that Neville never bit off more than he could chew, all while encouraging Neville so what he could chew was getting larger all the time. Harry might someday have to face again and fight Voldemort. He had no intention of doing so alone, no, he

would have trusted well-trained allies at his side. Hence his careful cultivation and encouragement of his friends.

Harry was pleased with the people he had chosen to be his friends. They were polite, smart, hard-working, and in general fun to be with. Their priorities matched well with his own. While from a mix of light, dark, and neutral families, all were moderates. Hermione was probably the only exception, she had so much hero worship of the teachers, and was the proverbial lamb staked out for slaughter when it came to the politics of the wizarding world. She also seemed to believe life revolved around books, the rest were aware it didn't. The group's general consensus was Hermione had her uses but she couldn't be trusted to keep secrets from adults because she didn't have the common sense of a goose. She was, however, exceptionally useful in the studying department. Harry didn't need her help, but she freed him up to study his own things while she explained, sometimes to ad nauseum, things to the other second years, for that alone Harry could tolerate her. Despite the stigmas that came with being a snake Harry was mostly happy in his choices about this part of his life.

The problems seemed to arise when it came to the adults around him at school. Lupin, did Harry want a connection to his father enough that he was willing to overlook the man's failure to provide any connection while he was growing up? Snape, too posed a conundrum, last year he had been a complete bastard. This year he seemed to want to be a mentor, that the man used no people skills whatsoever when it came to him (and if he was honest to seventy five percent or more of the student body) didn't escape Harry. Of course there was also Dumbledore and McGonagall to consider. The Headmaster and his deputy kept a very close eye on Harry. Sometimes the suspicious way they watched him almost had him wanting to do something ornery just for the hell of it. Thinking about the adults around him once again had him thinking in circles.

Harry wondered if he had been less sleep deprived if his reasoning and planning faculties would be more inclined to operate better. Draco was up every night, two or three times a night, with nightmares. Snape gave him dreamless sleep one night in three. On those nights Harry slept well too, but the rest, well... Harry was currently trying to find a spell that would shut out the room noise. He was currently looking through the fourth year curriculum. He needed more sleep, if he didn't get it soon he might actually suffer a

humiliating loss to Weasley. The two boys were at honors even at six wins each and seven draws in their chess games. Harry had lost the last game and was dreading this weekend's match all courtesy of not enough sleep because of his damn roommate.

But Draco's sleep patterns weren't his only beef with the blond. Despite numerous reminders, the other boy's belongings were found strewn over into Harry's half of the room about half the time.

Harry had snickered madly when two days ago Draco had complained, "That ruddy owl belongs in the owlery not our room. She chucked on my homework".

Harry had inquired, "Where was it sitting, that Hedwig had a shit on it?"

Draco had frowned and replied, "I can't remember."

Which Harry translated to, it had been sitting somewhere it shouldn't and Hedwig had been trying to deliver an object lesson.

When Draco complained to Snape, Snape had looked at Harry who had given him a go ahead I dare you sort of look. He promptly turned to his godson and said, "I guess you'll be more careful where you leave your homework."

The next day after potions Snape called Harry up. "A word if you please, Mr. Potter."

"Yes, Professor?"

"I looked through the school rules there is no rule against owls being kept in their owner's rooms, however, I suggest you keep it where it won't shit on your roommate's homework."

"Professor I'm positive that if Draco's homework had been properly put away on his desk or bookshelf it would not have been marked thus. Hedwig usually limits herself to eliminating only on the litter in her tray. But if Draco had left it, say on the floor. Well, Hedwig might have mistaken it for trash and well ..she's only a bird."

"Indeed... well...I see. Dismissed, Mr. Potter."

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Marcus had frowned at Harry when he saw him going through the books for fourth year. In general it was frowned on for the younger students to learn the spells for an older year. Most lacked both the power and the control to do the more advanced spells.

The reason why students were forbidden magic over the summer was they needed to not be working their magic so their connection would have a chance to grow. All magicals had magic to draw on. Children didn't come to school until they were eleven because their connection to their magic was sporadic at best until they turned ten or eleven. He had taught Harry the summoning charm on the train before first year, but when he'd done it he hadn't expected the younger boy to be able to do it. Because he'd expected Harry's connection to be too weak to sustain the spell. Usually after the ten months the students were at school they had worked the connection enough that it needed a chance to rest and strengthen. It wasn't to keep the children from doing anything so much as it was to strengthen their magic, something purebloods in general understood, but many muggleborn speculated was to hamper them. Which was a second reason for the no magic in the summer rule, youngsters didn't always have the best judgement of when magic was called for and when it wasn't. Normally the student's connection needed the time to strengthen before attempting the more advanced spells of the next year or the connection could be damaged or even snap. Most times if a spell was too demanding it simply wouldn't work. Marcus really didn't understand why they didn't teach this to the firsties, it would save so many problems.

"Potter, what are you doing?"

"Looking for a spell."

"What spell?"

"Something to prevent sound from entering or leaving my bed when I sleep at night."

Marcus instantly made assumptions about why Harry wanted such a spell. Malfoy was lucky he had a tolerant and smart roommate. Marcus had had to survive five years of a snoring roommate who after curfew when he wasn't snoring, was wanking, noisily. Marcus

had woken more than once to his roommate's noises. It had been awful and embarrassing, and it had been with great relief that Marcus had learned the silencing spell in fifth year. "It's a fifth year spell. I don't know if I should do this but I'll teach it to you."

"Why do you say that, Marcus?"

"Well... It's kinda hard to explain purebloods all know this, but since you grew up with muggles I guess you wouldn't. See the teachers start with the small, barely requiring anything spells. Think of wingardium leviosa. You start levitating a feather. As the year progresses, you add deliberate movement and weight. At the end of the year most firsties can handle between half to a full stone of weight. Transfiguration is the same you start with a needle by the end of the year you're transfiguring things with the weight and volume of a mouse or a snuffbox ..." Marcus went on to explain to Harry.

Harry's expression as he finished explaining was thoughtful.

"But what about family magics? I spent some of last summer learning those."

"Did you actually use your wand or were they ritual based?"

"Ritual."

"Ritual magic, especially family magics, work with your core differently. They really stem more from your blood which has a different connection to your core than your wand. You will probably learn more ritual magic during the summer than is ever taught at Hogwarts. By working wand during the school year and ritual in the summer, you get the best growth in your core. It's only after you reach your magical majority usually between sixteen and a half and seventeen that you'll get to learn wandless family magics."

"What about bindings on a person's magical core?"

"Those are taboo, because they act like a constant pull on the core one of my distant cousins had to have one for about a year as a child the healers had him under constant monitoring. They took it off because it was straining his core. He had to wear a bracelet that

monitored it always and he had weekly visits to a healer. Like I said it's important not to strain the connection or it could damage it."

"That explains a few things; like why binding a persons magic so often fractures their magic and if it doesn't it makes them absurdly strong. Hmn...interesting. Now could you please teach me the silencing spell?"

That night Harry had the first truly solid sleep he'd had in what seemed like weeks. He forgot to bring his alarm clock inside his bed curtains, and he overslept. Sleeping through breakfast and Potions resulted in his being called into Professor Snape's office late that afternoon.

"Sir?"

"You were not in Potions this morning. Where were you?"

"I'm sorry sir. I overslept."

"School is so taxing that you can't be bothered to wake up for classes, Mr. Potter? Maybe your family spoils you..."

"I haven't been sleeping well courtesy of the git you made my roommate, sir. In the last few weeks I haven't had a truly solid night's sleep. Even the nights when you gave him Dreamless Sleep, and I slept better, I still found myself waking more than I should, anticipating disturbances from Draco. You made no provision for my sleep sir. I understand the reasons you made the switch. But I rather resent you getting angry at me for a consequence you should have thought of. I dislike him for many reasons not the least of which is the little brat is a slob. I have made allowances for his privileged upbringing but between lack of sleep and his habits I'm unwilling to put up with your 'maybe your family spoils you' crap too.

"I overslept. I'm sorry. I'll make up the work. Last night I got blissfully uninterrupted sleep courtesy of a silencing spell for the first time since term began. Given what was happening, you should have taught me that spell weeks ago. In my sleep deprived state I forgot to move my alarm clock within the curtains and I overslept. Forgive me for being human.

"Maybe if the magical world didn't have such a burr up its arse regarding mental health, Draco would be having fewer issues. But of course the Malfoys have such a stick up their arses about muggles that they would never ever consider looking for counseling outside the magical world for help from a muggle counselor." Harry suddenly realized how disrespectfully he had just ranted at his Head of House.

He instantly moderated his tone. "Sir, I apologize profusely for my tone. It was out of line and disrespectful, my only excuse is weeks of sleep deprivation. I deserve detention for my disrespect. I just ask that you don't take points because of me. Our house doesn't deserve to be penalized for my poor behavior."

Harry figured that would be face-saving enough for Snape. Harry knew that Snape took points rarely from the house. He used the internal reward and punishment set up with each student at the first of the year to discipline the snakes. As a result Harry suspected he would be set giving remedial lessons to firsties for a month or more, sadly many of them needed it, and he would be denied goods retrieved from Hogsmeade. Had there been an audience when Harry ranted at the Professor a point loss would have been mandatory. Harry knew he'd never get the lenience that the rest of the snakes got. Never let it be said the Professor couldn't hold a grudge until doomsday. His line about your family spoiling you doubtlessly referred to his father's misdeeds and Snape was confusing him with his father again.

Severus Snape felt like he'd just been hit with a bludger. It was so obvious why hadn't he thought of that. Of course Lily's son was correct. The Malfoys would never have ever considered muggle counseling, but if there were books about healing from rape he could give them to Draco. It would have the added benefit of showing Draco that there were aspects of muggles worth knowing about. Which in turn could allow Draco to be less slavishly devoted to the same path his father chose. But first to find out what he could learn from the boy.

"Very well, apology accepted, no point loss will occur. You will however you will make yourself available for the Saturday morning remedial lessons for the rest of the winter term, Flint will be instructed to retrieve nothing from Hogsmeade for you for that duration as well. As for missing class this morning, three detentions:

one to make up the work, and two others to remind you why skipping class even for something like sleep is unacceptable.

"You state that the Malfoys should have looked to the muggles for counseling following Draco's attack, why?"

"Well, even if rape is almost unheard of in the magical world, in the muggle it is... well, not common, but not rare. As result, there are counselors trained in dealing with it. My Sensei's wife worked as a rape counselor. She frequently encouraged her patients to learn martial arts for defense. They came to the dojo. Because I was young and not very intimidating, I often served as a sparing partner for them when we had one in a class where I assisted."

"Do you know enough to help Draco?"

"No!" Harry's reply was sharp. He in actuality probably knew enough to help some after helping with some of those women at the dojo, but there was no way he wanted to grow any closer to the other boy. He moderated his tone slightly, he wasn't completely unsympathetic towards Draco either, no one deserved what had happened to him. "I could write my Sensei, perhaps his wife could recommend some books."

"That is a most seemly offer towards a housemate, I would appreciate your doing so. Mr. Potter..."

"Sir?"

"You were correct. It was remiss of me not to make provisions to see you got adequate rest despite Draco's difficulties. Two points to Slytherin for resourcefulness in seeing to it yourself. Dismissed. Oh, and detention at seven."

"Yes, sir."

Chapter 35

Remus Lupin had been patient, he had allowed Harry time and space. He knew he hadn't done well by the boy, but his wolf was starting to overwhelm his reason. It wanted his pack. Harry was pack. It was due to Harry that on full moons he had Padfoot again. With Sirius' permission his healer had talked to Remus.

Paige had told him Sirius was likely to be permanently damaged, but given the ten years in Azkaban high security it was a wonder he wasn't worse. Sirius had so many bad memories of his family that he had regressed mentally and emotionally to a maturity more like what he was at thirteen or fourteen. Sirius had finally been working with her and over the last two weeks he had made what she called significant progress, in terms of recognizing his failures as Harry's guardian that long ago October night. She had said it was progress but she warned Remus there was still a long way to go. Sirius needed to work through his issues about his family and he needed to grow up and make several realizations one of which was that a person's school house did not automatically determine if that person was good or evil, courageous or cowardly. It was that comment that gave Remus some insight into Harry's standoffish behavior. He really wondered what Padfoot had said to the somewhat prideful and studious boy.

Harry was unlike the other Slytherins, who travelled the school in self-defensive packs that constantly tried to position themselves as higher in the pecking order. He interacted without prejudice with all the houses and took instruction well. Singularly self-possessed, most other students even older ones skirted around him rather than interact with him. Some people took his attitude to be arrogance but Remus didn't think it was; he thought it more an independence of thought and self-reliance. The exception being his study group, they were in and of themselves remarkable in that they ignored everything but brainpower.

Harry was an amazing flier; James would have been proud. Remus hadn't seen him in a game yet, but he had watched the Slytherin team practice.

In class Harry was a bit of a defensive prodigy. In many ways Remus longed to work with the boy to see just how much he could learn and how quickly. But Harry didn't trust Remus, that was

obvious in the way the boy avoided being alone in the same room with him. Remus really wondered how Petunia raised him because he had been such a trusting little chap as a baby. There was nothing of that child in the boy now. Remus wondered if Lily were here now who she would curse more: Petunia for raising Harry to be so untrusting, Dumbledore for having put him with Petunia, or himself for being so weak as to allow Dumbledore to dictate the terms of his interaction with Harry.

Remus was also certain that if there was one person in the school Harry hated it was Albus. He also didn't seem to like Minerva, and from what Remus could see that was mostly mutual. Harry was very careful though, if he did any rule breaking, he had definitely absorbed the Slytherin motto of thou shall not get caught. Remus sometimes wished the other Slytherins had learned that one as well. He finally resolved to talk to Severus perhaps he could give some insight to Harry's psyche. To that end, he went to Severus' quarters and asked the portrait to ask Severus to let him in.

Moments later Severus opened his door. "What do you want wolf?" he asked with a sneer.

"I'd like to talk with you, about Harry."

Snape frowned. "Why?"

"You're his Head of House and I'd like to understand him better."

"Did Albus put you up to this?"

"Not exactly."

"Humph. Albus underestimated Petunia and he's been trying to make up ground in his manipulations ever since. Not too successfully I might add."

"What do you mean? Albus put Harry with Petunia to protect him. He-"

"Wants you to believe that of course. Surely you are adult enough to realize anything the Headmaster does has at least two or three motives and a dozen plans behind it or are you too much a

Gryffindor to see it. How that man was ever sorted into Gryffindor, I'll never know."

Remus was quiet. Part of him wanted to deny that the Headmaster would do any such thing. But the logical side of him demanded that he put his emotions to the side and examine this new thought. It was hard, he respected the Headmaster and he was grateful that the man had allowed him to attend Hogwarts. But there had been times when Albus had used that gratitude to get him to agree to things against his wishes, like remaining out of contact with Harry, and there was the matter of James' will...

"Come in. Have a seat. Yes, Harry is a conundrum. He is very like Lily. Very, very intelligent. I made mistakes with him last year, I mistook his physical likeness to James and his attitude as him being like James. My mistake...Don't mistake Harry's tolerance in interaction for forgiveness, from what I've seen he neither easily trusts nor forgives. He has not, and part of me suspects, he never will forgive me for last year."

"Why? What would make him that way?"

"I don't know. I know that Petunia has no love for magic or things that are magical. I know that Harry was not physically abused, I've checked Poppy's records to verify that. But I very much doubt he was raised with much love or acceptance. He's a very hard worker. I suspect he has always had to earn his way as it were. Some of what was in the paper last summer makes me sure of it. I know from his interactions with other students when threatened the boy can fight. He fights very well, if he knows or suspects he is outclassed magically he takes the fight physical and he is formidable, largely because there is a ruthlessness to him when he fights. Mad-eye Moody would like his fighting style. Also there is a ...part of him... "

"Yes?"

"Tell me Remus, were you ever on the receiving end of one of Lily's pranks?"

Remus remembered the one time he had provoked Lily into pranking him. Her retaliatory prank had left him quite certain he never ever wanted to arouse her ire ever, ever again. Her prank had been borderline cruel but it also had the effect of making him think.

James and Sirius had never been introspective enough to get the lesson but that hadn't stopped Remus from getting it. "Yes," he said hoarsely.

"Now imagine such a prank pulled on all of Hogwarts."

Remus winced.

"Exactly. There was no proof he was behind it. He's merely the most likely candidate. At the closing feast last year, everyone's biggest fear about themselves was put on display for the whole world to read.

"He is a suspect because last year he was being pranked unmercifully by the Weasley twins. Two, sometimes even three times a day they were getting him. In retrospect I suppose we teachers should have stepped in, but we didn't. I suppose... we all ignored his needs because he didn't...he wasn't what we expected. Stupid of us to think we would know him, that he would be precisely what we all imagined he would be, stupid of us to believe the fiction created about him and sold to a hungry public.

"It was harmless stuff, the pranks, embarrassing but harmless. Stuff that Harry seemingly ignored until he got sick of it. Then one day the Weasley twins found themselves singing "Ten Green Bottles" every waking moment that they weren't eating for three days straight. We couldn't figure out how to dispel it and silencing spells on them didn't work. He sent them a note signed Son of Prongs. If it weren't for that, no one would have known who it was that got the twins. They have left him alone since then, something about having been threatened with something even worse. It was impressive, let me tell you.

"Albus has always had plans for Harry Potter ever since...but with Harry, this Harry not the one he hoped to create, he is going to have to change his ways or he'll get nowhere. Sometimes I think the old man has lost his edge, old age is succeeding where Dark Lords and political maneuvering hasn't. Last year he brought what we all thought was a philosopher's stone here. He claimed Nicholas Flamel wanted him to protect it for him. He confided in me that he thought the Dark Lord was after it. Anyway he had us create protections for the stone. He actually had each of us come up with several for him to choose from. Imagine our surprise when he didn't pick the strongest we came up with. Harry accused the Headmaster of

designing it as a test for him. On reflection he was probably correct. Anyway he figured it out and despite Quirrell's substandard teaching, he successfully retrieved the stone when Quirrell forced him to by threatening Longbottom. What Harry somehow knew that the rest of us didn't, was the stone wasn't genuine. He used it to maneuver Quirrell, who apparently was being possessed by the Dark Lord, into freeing himself and Longbottom. They escaped and reported to us teachers. We reacted...poorly. Instead of commending the boys for their cleverness and resourcefulness we took points, two hundred of them each, for their risking themselves and their plain speaking about the whole misbegotten situation.

"Not one of my finer moments I assure you. It doesn't help that I have a hard time looking at him and not seeing James. Harry carries himself with an assurance that can easily be mistaken for James' arrogance, I sometimes forget and react to Harry as I would to James. It was only through a summer's reflection that I came to realize my...error. I've tried to do better, but this Harry is neither naïve nor trusting and I have yet to figure out what coin will buy his forgiveness. I would hope that Albus would also understand this, but he's so set in his ways, so sure he's the only one who can guide the wizarding world. He seems to see people Harry's age and he forgets that they have minds of their own and just because he sees things a certain way doesn't mean that they will see it the same way. I think my biggest fear right now is that he won't give up his manipulations and by continuing to try he'll turn Harry dark.

"Harry's not you know. He has the capacity for darkness, but he's not there yet. His relationships with the other students, especially Longbottom, is what allows me to hope. He will never be the shining hero Albus was hoping and manipulating for, but I believe he still could be the hero the wizarding world requires. I just hope Albus sees that before it's too late."

"I see. And Minerva, she doesn't seem to like Harry very much. Considering when he was a baby she treated him like a grandson..."

"I think Minerva doesn't ...isn't very comfortable with the person Harry is, and when she sees him as he is now she's reminded of her own failures. Last year she was merely uncomfortable but last summer's custody case has pushed her into active dislike."

"Last summer wasn't Harry's fault."

"Not directly perhaps. Don't make the mistake of underestimating the boy. There is a reason he is in my House. He definitely isn't the most ambitious member of my house, but he is certainly one of the craftiest and one of the most powerful if not the most powerful. He is my top second year for a reason, make no mistake. Lockhart made the mistake of underestimating him and now he's in Azkaban. Quirrell made that mistake and he's dead.

"Remus if you intend to pursue the relationship of a fond uncle with Harry, don't make the mistake of pushing him into doing things before he's ready and never ever be anything less than honest with him. My prefect who acts as Potter's mentor has passed that tidbit of advice to me after I asked. It's a bit late for me, but maybe it will be of use to you. Now that I have said all I will on the subject of Potter, I suggest you return to your den. I do not require the company of a wolf like yourself."

"Thank you, Severus." Remus headed back to his quarters contemplating everything he had just been told.

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Three weeks later as DADA class for the second years came to an end, Remus gathered his Gryffindor courage and voiced the desire of his heart. "Mr. Potter, I would like to have a word if I may."

"Professor?"

"Don't worry you're not in trouble."

"Is this regarding the basilisk, sir?"

"No, this is about you and your parents."

Harry couldn't help it; he tensed. For weeks now he'd had a raging internal debate on speaking to Remus Lupin. Now it appeared that choice was being taken from him. Served him right for not making a decision. Harry sucked up his irrational desire to flee and stuffed it down. "Fine."

"You know you look amazingly like James, except you have Lily's eyes."

"So I've heard. "

"Okay, this is amazingly difficult."

Harry felt irritated, first the man ignored his existence then he expect Harry to carry the burden of conversation. "So, what shall we talk about: the state of things in the Wizengamot, or would you rather explain to me why if you were such a great friend of my father's this is the first time I've spoken with you since they died? Tell me Professor Lupin, do you have to be paid to be a part of my life?"

"Ouch, but I guess I deserved that. No Harry, I would like to be a part of your life."

"Why? You've ignored my existence this long. What has changed ? I think I'm still the same person I was a year ago. Heck,I think I'm still the same person I was when you first came to work here after Christmas. Given that we are approaching the Easter hols, I ask again: what has changed that you now are suddenly interested in knowing me?"

"I've always wanted to know you. I just ..." Remus tried to see it from Harry's perspective. It looked really bad . Was there anything he could say that could possibly make this situation better? "I think discussing the Wizengamot would be easier," he muttered. He cast a spell to close the classroom door and to silence and lock it. "Bloody hell, shag it all," he burst out, "I'm a werewolf. I regarded Sirius, your father and Peter as my pack. That night I lost my pack. I was devastated. In my angst I turned to someone that I trusted and he advised it would be better not to be in contact with you, that I should just leave it to your aunt to raise you. That it would be less confusing for you that way. I believed him."

"Let me guess, Albus Dumbledore was who you talked to."

"Yes." Remus was surprised.

"Figures, I hate that man. I hate him as much as I hate Voldemort." Mentally he added to himself 'and from where I sit there isn't much difference.' Harry wanted to relieve his fury through shouting or pacing, but to do so would give too much away to someone who was in Dumbledore's camp.

Remus was shocked by Harry's declaration. To his knowledge no one who was light would express such an opinion. That Harry placed both men in the same category was far from reassuring as to what had happened to Bambi while he was growing up. He continued, " As a werewolf I am not well accepted by magical society as a whole, in fact most magical society regards me as a pariah. Sometimes I look at myself that way too."

"So despite the fact that my parents found you acceptable company, you paint me with the same bigoted brush as the rest of the wizarding world . Thank you so much for your lofty opinion of me! I see how much you value a relationship with me. Was it really too hard to send a Christmas card or a letter?"

Remus winced at the sarcasm that dripped from Harry's voice. "Sirius and I have really messed up where you're concerned haven't we?"

"Well, at least you don't seem to hold my house against me."

Remus winced again. Part of him wanted to reach out and hug the upset pre-teen. It was what his wolf wanted him to do, but he was more aware than ever that this was not the same boy as he had dandled on his knees all those years ago. "I'm sorry. I realize those words probably are completely inadequate but they are the only ones I have. I will do better. I promise. I would have spoken to you before, but it has taken me this long to work up the courage, so much for my supposed Gryffindor bravery."

"Bravery is overrated. I'd choose survival over it every time."

It wasn't much of an opening from Remus' perspective but beggars couldn't be choosers and he sensed it was the only one he'd get. "Know a lot about survival?"

"A fair amount, my sensei has taught me quite a bit."

"Sensei?"

"Yes, sorry, sensei means teacher. It is a term of respect. Sensei taught me how to defend myself physically, he taught me about astronomy, code breaking, strategy and survival skills. Most

importantly he taught me that I don't necessarily have to be what Aunt Petunia wants me to be, that I can choose my own path."

To Remus that last statement made clear the source of the acrimony between the Headmaster and Harry. Since his conversation with Severus, Remus had found himself analyzing the Headmaster over the years, and it had become obvious that the man had a manipulative streak. There were too many instances where he had guilt tripped, or told an incomplete truth so that he could get his own way. Remus couldn't classify those actions as dark, after all, they were generally for the public good, and it wasn't like Albus was forcing other people to do his will. But obviously despite all his years and wisdom, Albus didn't know everything and his machinations had turned Harry away from him.

"He sounds like a very wise person. I'm glad he is there for you. I hope in time I can earn your respect. I'm sorry I failed you so badly. Is there something I can do to make it up to you?"

Harry heard that and decided he would give the man a chance, he wouldn't trust him but maybe the older man could serve as a means of spying on the Headmaster. But if he were to do that, he'd have to be very careful. Especially if he eventually wanted the man's loyalty to him to be greater than that to Dumbledore. As far as the man being a werewolf that didn't bother Harry. He didn't know enough to be bothered; just that werewolves were brought out by the full moon and that meant the man before him was only dangerous in the sense of being a werewolf once a month. He resolved to look it up as soon as possible. "Maybe." He said. "Did my solicitors finally get you the bequest my parents left you?"

"Yes, it took me by surprise."

"I imagine it did. I was very unhappy when I returned to the magical world and discovered their last wishes hadn't been carried out. Professor Lupin, if we're going to make this work, I want it understood that praise of Headmaster Dumbledore is abhorrent to me. That man did things to me that hurt me and he left me feeling like I was the one to blame. I was a child and making a child feel the way I did is wrong. You can respect him, even though I don't, but don't ever praise him around me. Are we clear on that?"

"I suppose." Remus was left wondering what the heck Albus had done to Harry, that he so adamantly despised the Headmaster.

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Cassandra was perplexed. Most all the dossiers she had been asked to compile were proving to be straightforward, if you knew where to look and were willing to be patient and methodical but two were proving to be less so. One she had expected, that of Albus Dumbledore, the other was for Tom Marvolo Riddle. The man was easily traced right up until he vanished off the records around nineteen forty-eight. His file gave her the heebie-jeebies.

She glanced at the clock. She was supposed to have tea with Bathilda Bagshot in an hour. The ancient witch had been a neighbor to Albus Dumbledore as a child. Hopefully she would have some tales of Dumbledore as a child that would give Cassandra new lines of inquiry.

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Harry frowned at his opponent across the chess board, as he said , "Checkmate."

Ron grimaced and said, "Sorry, my attention is elsewhere."

"On your sister perhaps?"

"Yeah."

"What's going on?"

"Well the healers are sure it is possession but they can't figure out how. Ginny's gonna have to stay in the secure ward at St. Mungo's until they figure it out. Dunno how Mum and Dad will afford that and school for us all next year."

"Hmm."

"Most of Gryffindor is... well, they aren't exactly feeling very understanding towards me and my brothers right now. Despite being a prefect Percy might as well not exist, and if Fred and George weren't on the quidditch team no one would be talking to them either.

"I don't know why I'm talking to you. You're in Slytherin and probably don't even care."

Ron Weasley's dejected tone touched a cord in Harry. He knew that all alone feeling very well. He had felt it most of last year. "I get what you're feeling. After last year, I empathize with the whole shunning business for something you can't help a bit too well."

Ron Weasley blushed as he realized that he had been one of the people shunning the boy across from him. Harry Potter was definitely not your average snake. He didn't hold his fame over anyone's head the way Draco Malfoy tried to hold his father's wealth and connections over everyone's heads. He worked as hard as most Hufflepuffs, and was as smart or smarter than most Ravenclaws. In fact it was disturbingly easy for the young lion to look across the table and just see a normal boy.

"Is Neville okay with you?"

"Yeah, actually he's one of the few who treats me decent. Why, after I was such a git to him last year, I dunno."

"Neville isn't one to harass another."

"Yeah, but...I was stupid. I gave him a hard time last year for doing the same thing we're doing right now. I gave him a hard time for talking to you. I guess it goes to show how wrong you can be when you judge other people without getting to know them."

"It does tend to limit your options."

"I guess it does. Thanks for listening anyway." Ron half smiled when the other boy answered him with a shrug.

That evening as Harry returned to the dorm from the library he turned everything he knew about the whole Weasley situation over in his mind. Possession via unknown means, the way Ron and his brothers were being treated, suddenly Luna's words came back to him. "Ginny isn't herself her only friend is that diary." Harry had a sudden sense of a-ha.

He needed to write a note. If he went to the teachers with this it would be brushed aside, but if he wrote an anonymous note and sent it to her healer...He opened the door to his room and was disgusted. Draco's crap was all over the room, again. He kicked what was on the floor on his side into a pile and he added the other things lying around his side of the room. He pulled the robe that Draco had draped across his desk off and thought of just discarding it to the floor. Just then Draco came in.

"What are you doing with my robe. Potter?"

"Moving it."

"How dare you?"

"Easily. it was on my desk. How many times do I have to tell you Malfoy keep your crap picked up?"

"What gives you the right to touch any of my things?"

That was it. Harry was fed up with the ferret faced twit. "Don't want me to touch your stuff then fine, I told you when you moved in here to keep your crap tidy. You haven't. This," He shook the robe in his hand. "was on MY desk. MY workspace! Which means obviously you have too much stuff. So how about I help you with that." Harry dropped the robe he was holding atop the large pile of mixed things that sat on the floor on his side of the room and pulling his wand said calmly, "Incendio."

Draco's shriek of "POTTER!" through the open door brought the prefects running.

Harry had cast the fire spell with a large, very hot, and almost smokeless blaze. By the time the prefects reached their room there was nothing of Draco's belongings to salvage.

Draco looked torn between fury and wanting to cry over the loss of his belongings. The fifth year prefect burst into the room. "What in the name of Merlin is going on in here?"

"I was just helping Malfoy get rid of a few things, is all. He has so much that he hasn't got room to keep it all tidy and on his side of the

room." Harry smiled benignly at the older boy. The last bit of flame died in the pile of ash that had once been Malfoy's things.

The prefect looked around the room: Draco's side was messy, Harry's was neat as a pin. The pile of ash was on Harry's side.

"Next time Potter, use the fireplace in the common room, no incendio's in the dorm rooms."

"That's it that's all you're going to say? He destroyed my stuff!"

"No. Malfoy, clean this room up. You're setting a bad example."

Harry calmly said, "Evanescio." The ash vanished. "There, much better. I'll keep what you said in mind, Prefect Hollister."

Draco, still not allowed to carry a wand, burst into tears at this perceived unfairness. "You destroyed my favorite robe."

"Yes, well it should have been hanging in your wardrobe, not lying on my desk. I have been patient all term with you, Malfoy, but no more."

"My father will-"

Harry pushed the door to their room closed behind the departing prefect because he knew it had been silenced by Snape himself. The moment it latched, Harry exploded into action. He shoved Draco against the wall next to the door. "I don't give a rat's ass about your daddy, Malfoy. You go around talking big, but you haven't got what it takes to back it up. You are too bigoted to ask for the help you so obviously need; just because you would have to admit that muggles are as valid a life form as your own. You spout how the Malfoy motto is we bow to no one, yet both your father and grandfather bowed down to Voldemort. You brag about how you're so much better than everyone else but you're seated what fifth, or is it sixth in the class? It must really grate to be behind both me, a halfblood, and Granger, a muggleborn. All term you've been nothing but a pain in my arse, first, your slovenly habits, second, your nightmares because you won't suck it up and deal with what happened to you with Lockhart.. I despise you. You're a weak, whiney, spoiled, selfish brat who can't see reality. You have more in common with the Gryffindors than with

Slytherin because you spout off and couldn't plan anything to save your life. You cunning? My ass.

"Your stated goal is to be just like your father. Your father, who had to bribe his way out of prison following the last war. Your father, who is clearly a bigot. Well congratulations, Malfoy, I think you're doing fine on your ambition to be like your old man. But if you talked to people on Diagon Alley would they say your father is a fabulous person? Or would they call him a dark, smarmy, pompous, bigot with delusions of grandeur? Because looking at you, I know which I would say you and he both are. Stay in your side of the room and shut up. If I have to deal with you again tonight, I will probably make you wish you were dead. Got it?"

Draco was smart enough to realize his roommate meant every word. So he nodded fearfully and -upon being released- shuffled quickly to retrieve his bath things and pajamas. Deciding that going to bed despite his nightmares would be safer than staying up and irritating his rather touchy roommate.

Harry sat down at his desk, pulled out a parchment and started writing.

Disclaimer: NOT Blonde, Not rich, not living in Britain, initials are not JKR therefore don't own. Love the characters and the setting so I am just playing, I get nothing but the reviews my readers give me. Authorship shared with Darkshadowedrose. Beta read by Alix33.

A/N: Sorry for slow updates. Summer heat kills my creativity and I have so many projects both with writing and RL that I'm just slow.

Trust is a Relative Thing

Chapter 36 Making Peace

Harry felt strange. At Professor Lupin's request Sunday afternoon they had tea, Harry quickly discovered that while the Professor could tell him stories about his father but he had relatively few about his mother.

"Lily was wonderful. She was smart. She excelled at Potions and Charms. She loved James very much. She- they loved you very much, I think the day you were born was the happiest day of their lives."

Harry wanted to say, 'Well, duh she married him.' And he already knew that she excelled at Potions and Charms from her journals. Subconsciously though it was very reassuring to hear from someone who had known them that they loved him very much.

"Professor.."

"Yes, Harry?"

"I've been wondering if...never mind it's stupid."

""What Harry? I very much doubt if anything you could ask would be dumb."

Harry mentally cheered, he wanted extra defense tutelage. "I just, well...Last year, Lord Voldemort tried to return. He tried to kill me once before, he did kill my family. He doesn't strike me as the type to worry about collateral damage. He took Neville to force me to do what he wanted. I was wondering if you would be willing to teach me and my friends extra defense. Last year Quirell wasn't really very good and Lockhart was a danger to himself and others."

"I'm flattered. But what about your other classes?"

"We're all top students. I just somehow know that being my friends is going to one day put them in danger. If not from Voldemort, then from his followers."

"You would think about his followers, given you're in Slytherin."

"Are you one of those people that think if you're in Slytherin you're automatically Dark?"

"What? No! I know better, that's like people who say werewolves are automatically evil. I could never do that, not with what I am. I just meant that a lot of the families in Slytherin were followers."

"Yeah, I suppose. Most of the students in the house are okay with my being there but there are a few... Professor Snape kind of laid down the law after Draco Malfoy attacked me last year. The dark ones pretty much act like I don't exist. Which is fine."

"Draco Malfoy attacked you?"

"Yes. I kind of provoked him into it though."

"Why? How?"

"Why? Because the git was messing with my grades trying to get me in trouble with the teachers. I figured if I got him in hot water they would back off. It worked. He almost got expelled, if his father hadn't stepped in and used his influence he would have been. How? Well...That was a thing of beauty, see I said..."

Remus listened to the story and was enthralled. He laughed loudly when he heard what Harry said about Lucius Malfoy. It was obvious that Harry did have a prankster streak and he understood human nature very well. The whole thing was well done, it definitely showed that Harry understood the political side of life as well, something Lily had understood but that had escaped James completely until after seventh year. It was also sad, because while Harry's eyes sparkled with delight as he told the story, as the story ended Harry's mask came back over his face.

"So you can see why I think it would be good if my friends got some extra defense training." Harry concluded.

"Yes, yes I can see that. I'll have to discuss it with the Headmaster, to see if I can open up a defense practical to allow students to expand their knowledge."

"Oh, but-"

"Harry I could teach you alone because I was good friends with your father but as soon as I open that teaching up to your friends I have to open it to the student body or it becomes grounds for accusations of favoritism and it could get me fired."

Harry's expression clouded. "I see. I'm sorry. I didn't think about that." Harry thought carefully. He supposed it was possible for him to learn from Lupin, and turn right back around and teach his friends. "I'll have to think about it then."

"Okay. I wanted to talk to you about your godfather." Remus was astonished at how fast Harry shut down.

"What about him?"

"I don't know what he said to you, but I know he didn't really mean it. He's still...confused because of Azkaban."

"Maybe but in my mind that makes it more, not less, likely that he would say what he really thinks. He despises me for being a snake rather than a lion. His prerogative, just as it's mine to have nothing to do with him."

Remus winced. He could now see that less than forgiving side that Severus Snape said Harry had. "Sirius has issues, he spent so much time in-"

"Save it. Yes, he has issues, serious ones if you'll pardon the pun, not the least of which is a puny mind. Leave it, Professor."

Remus debated saying more but decided not to risk the fragile rapport that he was establishing with Harry.

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Healer Smethwyck was stymied. He was positive it was possession by some spirit but he had traced no means by which the spirit could have connected to the soul of this girl. The spirit was slowly but surely draining her. Sooner or later this girl would die if he didn't figure this out. The ward nurse knocked softly on his office door.

"Yes, Janice?"

"This just arrived via a snowy owl."

"What is it?"

"I don't know but it is addressed healer in charge of Ginerva Weasley's case."

"Then I guess I should open it, shouldn't I."

To the healer in charge of Ginerva Weasley,

I am a fellow Hogwarts student of Miss Weasley's. I have spoken to her brother and I understand the diagnosis for Miss Weasley is possession, but that you're having difficulties finding the means by which this has happened. I was having a conversation with another acquaintance of Miss Weasley and she mentioned that Miss Weasley's only current friend appeared to be a diary. I, myself, have not seen the diary and have not spoken with Miss Weasley, but feel it is an avenue worth exploring.

Sincerely, a concerned Hogwarts student

Healer Smethwyck sighed if he were one whit less desperate in this case he would simply pitch this letter into the trash. Unfortunately he was that desperate, and they were at the point where any lead was worth following. He headed to the ward to find Molly Weasley.

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The school relaxed a bit as no more attacks occurred. Slytherin stomped Hufflepuff in their quidditch game, and were looking forward to the match with Ravenclaw. They were in the lead for both the quidditch cup and the house cup, and contrary to previous years

they were playing a mostly clean game instead of bullying their way there as they had done previous years.

The teachers were no closer to figuring out how to get access to the Chamber than they had been after the return from the winter holidays and they were starting to consider bricking over the entrance to the girls bathroom that Myrtle lived in.

Harry and Neville finally persuaded their cadre of friends to rise early and join them for exercise in the mornings.

"Why are we doing this again?" Susan panted to Daphne, Hannah, Hermione, and Tracey .

"Because if we're fit we'll be able to cast longer and be better able to dodge, besides more boys will notice us if we're shapely than if we're blobs." Hermione answered, knowing that the other girls were interested in boys, and fighting her own resentment of the situation. Her mother had voiced a concern over the Easter holidays that Hermione was gaining a little more weight than was strictly healthy due to not balancing her book reading time with more active pursuits, joining the group for morning exercise was her answer. At least this way she wasn't the only girl here, Lavender and Parvati mocked Hermione saying that she was foolish and would doubtlessly wind up an old maid because what wizard would want a girl that wasn't soft, and was smarter than them. Which left her feeling afraid of the future in many ways because she did want a husband someday, but she wasn't willing to compromise her principles to do so.

Harry had overcome Michael and Blaise's objections by pointing out that while, yes, they were wizards not muggles, having hand-to-hand skills meant that if they were in the muggle world they could definitely avoid being accused of breaking the Statute of Secrecy by being able to defend themselves without magic. He also mentioned how girls noticed strong and fit boys. Harry shook his head inwardly because for all their intelligence the boys were rather simple, and both had entered the stage of thinking with their gonads. Harry dreaded the day when his own body started acting that way. It wasn't that he was still a little boy thinking girls had cooties, but he didn't really see the draw yet and he preferred to avoid acting the idiot that so many boys did around girls.

Even Aaron had joined them although he didn't participate in the actual hand-to-hand portion. The research into osteogenesis imperfecta having convinced him that exercise, like tai chi and walking, could actually help his bones get stronger. He walked while the others ran, and couldn't wait for summer when he would swim, or so he told Harry.

The last few months of school went by, Harry's cadre studying hard, Harry taking Remus up on the private tutelage and turning around and teaching it to his friends. During one of his weekend games with Ron Weasley he heard that they had found a diary with the name Tom Marvolo Riddle on it that was responsible for Ginny Weasley's possession. But that curing her wasn't as straightforward as they thought, because so far the diary had resisted all attempts at destroying it. Experts from the ministry's Unspeakables were studying it.

Draco never again allowed his belongings to overrun Harry's side of the room. The thing Harry couldn't figure out was how when he was so infernally sloppy with his belongings yet he always managed a neat as a pin appearance especially since Draco wasn't allowed his wand. He found it annoyingly unfair. He was tidy in his habits, but due to his hair always presented a ruffled appearance. Blaise, after a couple weeks of snorting amusement at Harry's disgruntlement, explained that all magical children learned to perform a few simple self care charms wandlessly, most by the age of eight. He took pity on Harry and showed him all the basic charms to brush his teeth, press and spot clean his clothing, and to clean his face and hands. He explained most wizards did these charms several times a day as a matter of habit. Blaise also tried to teach him the charm that wizards used on their hair but Harry quickly gave up on that one when his hair went from looking a bit like hedgehog spikes to looking like something was trying to make a home in his hair. Harry thought at least with the spikes, his hair was obviously clean.

Finally the last weeks of term arrived, and with it finals. After Harry's last test, he went to his Head of House's office.

"Yes, what is it, Mr. Potter?"

"Sir, I've kept quiet about something all year, not wanting to cause panic or to be blamed for something I didn't do, but with the plan to brick over the girls bathroom I feel that I should say something.

Bricking up the bathroom is a poor solution to the problem in my opinion, what would stop someone from vanishing the bricks? The only way to ensure the basilisk is never used to harm students again is to kill it, is it not?"

"I agree but without a parseltongue to open the chamber we have no way of doing so."

"Can you give me your word never to tell anyone what I am about to tell you without my express permission and without garnering the same promise from them?"

Severus Snape's instincts sharpened. Here was possibly his chance to build a tie to the world's next powerful wizard. He didn't kid himself: Albus was old, and he had his eye on Harry as a successor. Harry- while quiet- was a powerful young wizard in his own right, despite how much as he personally might wish to deny the fact. He instinctively drew his wand and used the wording of a wizard's oath to answer. "I, Severus Snape, swear on my magic to hold the information Harry James Potter tells me to myself. Telling only those he gives me permission to tell, and only after getting an oath of secrecy from them."

Harry recognized the wording and a half-smile crept across his face at the glow from Professor Snape's wand. "I am a parselmouth. I am not completely sure of the how. I spoke with the portraits of my ancestors over the Christmas holidays and one mentioned a dark spell that has in the past been used to steal family magics. If a family was hunted to extinction before the last member was killed this spell could be used to take magic that is traditionally passed by the blood. But if both were the last of their line and the attacking wizard failed in his attempt then his family magic would be the one forfeited. I believe that Voldemort was the last of Slytherin's line and that he had intended to take the Potter family magics. But when whatever happened happened it cost him the Slytherin magics instead. I tell you this because I believe I could possibly open the chamber of secrets so the basilisk could be dealt with."

"You have spoken with a snake before?"

"Yes, several times. To me it just sounds like English, but I've been told I'm hissing."

"Interesting. I agree that the plan to brick over the bathroom is impractical. Your explanation as to how you, a Potter, is a parselmouth also makes sense. I will need to speak to the Headmaster-" Snape watched as Harry's face hardened. "Why so much dislike for the Headmaster? He is the acclaimed Leader of the Light, to dislike him is to cast one's own goodness into question."

" I tell you this in confidence, under the same instructions as the fact I am a parselmouth. I dislike those that deny others their right to choose their own path: those that manipulate, tell half-truths, and guilt or otherwise force others into doing their bidding. Those who, while maybe having good intentions, commit heinous acts in the name of the greater good. Who is to say his greater good isn't the road to hell? To quote a muggle saying, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I know this is a rather heretical notion in the wizarding world, but I believe that everyone has a bit of larceny deep down in their soul. I find myself asking what is in it for the Great and Powerful Albus Dumbledore as I look at how he tries to force me into a certain mold.. I ask what is his greater good going to cost me, and finally, would I also count it as worth the price?

"He has lead the wizarding world for the better half of the last half-century. But prejudice is rampant even here at Hogwarts or perhaps I should say especially here. The wizarding world is limited in philosophy, art, music and in many respects it lags far behind the muggle world. If this is his idea of leadership, perhaps it's time for someone with new ideas. Just so it is clear, when I say it's time for new ideas; I don't mean ideas of the sort that Voldemort espouses. That if anything is moving us backwards."

Severus felt stunned. He had never before heard such a succinct summation of the Headmaster's modus operandi. "So, do you want to be this new leader?"

"Not really, I'm actually somewhat lazy at heart. I want to be happy, to have work to do, people to love, and things to keep my body and mind stimulated. I want the world around me to be a mostly happy, safe and prosperous place."

"That's it? That is the sum of your ambition?"

"Yes."

"But..." Severus Snape blinked dumbfoundedly at the boy across from him. "How could you possibly be sorted in to Slytherin with that bit of Hufflepuffish drivel as the sum of your ambition?"

A half-smile crossed Harry's face, "Consider who I am, and who seeks to use me, and who seeks my destruction, Professor. I find it ambitious enough." Harry thought for a moment. ""You have my permission to tell the Headmaster I came to you and informed you I am a parselmouth, but that is all you may tell him, nothing of my speculation of how that came to be and certainly nothing I've said of my motives. With Marcus leaving, you and I are going to be forced into a working relationship of sorts. If even a whisper of my motives or ambitions becomes known I will know from whence the leak was sprung and rest assured what little trust I place in you will dry up and blow away. Don't disappoint me." Harry rose to his feet and left the office, leaving the Professor to contemplate the truth in his words and to decide how and what to say to the Headmaster.

Severus Snape sat -quietly turning over what he'd been told in his head- for several minutes. He was startled when a knock sounded on his office door. It was Draco.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, come in, Draco. Take a seat. I have something for you." He used his wand to close his office door and set up a few privacy wards. "You are still having problems with the attack?"

Draco drooped and looking at his lap he said, "Yes, sir."

"Draco, the shame of what happened is not on you, indeed it belongs to Lockhart and to myself and the other faculty for not protecting you."

"But- I'm the one he... he-"

"I know. But you are not at fault. Be quiet a moment. I have helped you keep this secret, have I not? I have brewed potions for you, yes?"

Draco nodded, unsure of where this was going.

"In the magical world among magicals rape is unheard of, we have no means by which we can counsel those who are raped or almost raped. This is not the case in the muggle world. I have in between my duties here at school sought out muggle rape counselors and made an effort to learn what they know. I have done this because your father would never consent to send you to a muggle therapist. I will ask that you read these books, Draco. Do the exercises in them, and I will come and talk to you we can discuss these books or anything else when I come each week. This must stay between us, Draco. If your father knew of it, he would surely forbid it. I believe if you and I do this then you may get better. You do wish to get better?"

"Yes, I do and I understand." Draco took the books. He found himself wondering if this was what Harry had meant. He had a great respect for the other boy. His father would be furious to hear him say it, but he did. Harry kept his word: he had not told anyone, he had not mocked Draco for his nightmares, he had not insulted Draco or his family unless provoked, he even had followed through and burned Draco's belongings when they were left on his side of the room. Potter took care of his friends, he worked hard for the things he got and expected neither praise or adulation. He was a good person. He would act for the benefit of others even if it gained him nothing as long as the cost was worth it in his mind. His biggest fault that Draco could see was he had a temper. He was slow to trust and even slower to forgive.

Draco found it odd that he did want Harry's forgiveness, for his actions first year. It had taken a long time but Draco had come to understand that he had overreacted to Potter's words. He had even come to see that he had partly deserved it and that the timing of that confrontation was positively Slytherin, despite the other boy's Gryffindorkish traits. Given all of those things Draco honestly wanted to be counted as one of Harry's friends. He knew however, after what was said first year that his father would forbid it, and that his father wasn't above using the children of his fellow Death Eaters to spy on his son's activities.

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A/N: Thanks for the many lovely reviews. This chapter is dedicated to capctr who caught the reference! :D Sections set off by ** lean heavily on Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets American Edition chapter 16 & 17.

Trust is a Relative Thing

Chapter 37 The Chamber of Secrets

Albus Dumbledore was surprised when Severus Snape made an appointment to see him. He had just returned from a rather unpleasant meeting between the Unspeakable known as Croaker, himself, Amelia Bones in her capacity of head of DMLE, Arthur Weasley, and the Minister.

The Unspeakable had just informed them that Tom Marvolo Riddle a.k.a. Lord Voldemort was still in one sense alive in that he had made horcruxes and therefore could be resurrected by means of dark ritual, or through the means of possession as had apparently been attempted by whomever had given little Ginny Weasley the diary. The Unspeakable had said their testing showed that the diary's soul fragment was large and that they had tested to see if he had made others. They had traced at least two others as being in London before necessity forced them into destroying the diary. Which would account for the increasing madness characteristic of his last rise to power. The others would need to be hunted down and destroyed ASAP or they might be facing a return of Lord Voldemort. If he had made three then it was highly probable that he had tried to make seven there by splitting his soul into eight - the symbol of infinity turned perpendicular.-parts The diary had been destroyed by means of fiendfyre and the drain on Ginny Weasley had been stopped before she died.

Fudge had been appalled and had tried to deny that it was possible.

The Unspeakable Croaker put a stop to that rather quickly, "As little as any of us want this to be true, denial will not help. Minister, you need to act in ways to support the DMLE so they can get stronger

through training and through adding aurors rather than cutting their funding, and enable them to work with my department to track down these things and destroy them. We won't have to deal with a returned Dark Lord, or if we do we'll be better off than if you wait until he's back. If you do this, I will be content to maintain the fiction that you're a competent minister. However, if you bury your head in the sand like the ostrich you are so fond of being and continue to take bribes from those of questionable ties, I will publish my findings and be sure to point my finger towards you as the source of the coverup. I wonder how long it would take to generate a vote of no confidence?"

Fudge had all but peed his pants, and Amelia's budget had been doubled.

Albus had returned to his office, annoyed that the information about Tom's survival technique was now known by so many. It might make things awkward. He had to work on getting into the proper genial mindset before Severus got to his office.

"Yes, Severus, what is it?"

"You know the plan we made to brick over the girls' bathroom?"

"Yes."

"Well, it might not be necessary."

Albus' attention snapped to the Head of Slytherin House. "And why not?"

"First, I need you to give me a wizard's oath not to tell anyone this information, not without first getting Mr. Potter's permission."

"Is that truly necessary, Severus?"

"He required that same oath of me, Headmaster."

"Very well. I, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, swear on my magic not to share the information given to me without the express permission of Harry James Potter."

Severus looked around and noticed several of the paintings in Albus' office taking a large interest in their conversation so he cast a quick muffliato just to be sure.

"Harry Potter came and confessed to me that he is a parselmouth."

Albus' mind immediately jumped to how a Potter might possibly have that ability. It came up with several possibilities- none of them good- especially in light of the earlier meeting. "Really and why is he just coming forward with that information now?"

"He feels the current plan of just bricking over the girls' bathroom has too many long term risks. We have spoken and are agreed that the safest long term course for the school is the destruction of the basilisk. He didn't come forward before because he was afraid of being blamed. He, for an additional ten percent of the value of the beast, will help us." Severus knew Harry hadn't actually made that stipulation, but if he acted in Harry's interests then perhaps he could garner more of the boy's trust.

Albus, while inwardly cringing at the reminder that Harry was a Slytherin, considered. "All right, Mr. Potter will stay with us after the Express has left and portkey home after we have slain the beast."

"I will let him know, Headmaster."

"Thank you, Severus." Albus wanted to grumble. An old basilisk like the one in the chamber was undoubtedly worth a sizable fortune and Harry Potter had nibbled away on that fortune yet again. Still it had the potential to refill Hogwarts' coffers which were starting to run lower than the founders would have liked thanks to the Wizarding world's regrettable tendency towards creating dark lords.

Slytherin House delighted in the green and silver decorations at the leaving feast. The next morning Harry quietly read the books Cassandra had sent him that were for his summer courses in the library, while the rest of the school students created mass chaos as they gathered themselves for the return home. Harry had warned the cadre not to expect to see him on the train, fobbing them off with the excuse that he was going home by portkey due to business. He had used the excuse enough over the year when he had been dealing with either decisions about his properties or when dealing with issues related to his fame that none of them questioned it,

except Neville who merely raised an eyebrow. Once the last of the carriages left Harry joined the Headmaster, the Heads of Houses, Remus Lupin and half a dozen goblins outside Moaning Myrtle's bathroom.

"Albus what is this about?" Minerva McGonagall complained, "And what is he doing here ? Why isn't he on the train?"

"WE are here to get rid of Slytherin's creature. He is here because-" Albus stopped short when a tug on his magic reminded him of his oath.

"I will tell you why I am here myself, after you all swear a wizard's oath to keep the information to yourselves, and to only tell others with my express permission." Harry was glad this hallway didn't have any paintings close by.

Remus was quick to swear, as were the goblins. Flitwick and Sprout while slower after being assured that the oath Harry sought was limited specifically to the small piece of information also swore.

Minerva McGonagall was the only hold out. "My word should be enough, I'm a Gryffindor."

Harry, disgusted by this, said, "The same Gryffindor who walked away and left her responsibilities on a doorstep? Either swear the oath or leave. I have better things to do than stand here waiting on you all day!"

"MR. Potter!" Rang out a chorus of reprimanding voices.

"Summer has started. I remind you all, not one of you has official authority over me. I dislike dithering, indecisive behavior. Swear the oath or leave, Professor McGonagall, it is as simple as that." Harry made sure to use a moderate and conciliatory tone, although he felt like swearing.

With much grumbling Minerva swore because she didn't want to be left out.

"I am a parselmouth. I don't know how. I suspect it had something to do with the night my parents died. I said nothing of this while school was happening because as you can tell by the oath it isn't

something I want widely known, and we all know how efficient the Hogwarts gossip chain is. I don't want it known because of the fear it would generate. I have no desire to be known as the next dark lord merely because I have the harmless ability to speak to snakes and was sorted to Slytherin. Like most all magic parseltongue is harmless, until its user intends otherwise. Now that you all know, let's search this bathroom and see if we can find the entrance."

They went into Myrtle's bathroom where they proceeded to search. It was Professor Sprout who found that the third sink didn't function and on closer examination Harry spotted the small snake on the tap. It took him a couple of tries before he managed to speak parseltongue and tell it to "~open~"

As the entrance to the chamber opened, Harry felt a sharp surge of curiosity and started forward only to be snagged and pulled back by Professor Snape.

Remus Lupin ,once he got over the shock that his best friend's son was a parselmouth, was undeniably intrigued. When the tunnel opened before him he couldn't resist. The old marauder instinct drove him into the tunnel and he enjoyed the slide.

Snape depreciatingly muttered, "Gryffindors."

When Remus reached the bottom he called back up "I'm alright, if a bit filthy. Let me clean up some of these animal skeletons and cast some freshening charms."

Harry looked at the slide. "How will we get back up?"

"Salazar Slytherin was not stupid. He probably had command words." One of the goblins said.

"Command words?" Severus Snape said.

Harry, his mind going ninety miles a minute, said, "Command words... like~stairs~." He gave a victorious grin when stairs formed. The headmaster gave him an approving nod and the group moved downward. Harry pulled something out of his pocket and put them on.

Snape recognizing Muggle sunglasses said "It's dark down there I hardly think you'll need sunglasses."

"Au contraire, Professor, note the lenses of these sunglasses."

Professor Snape took a moment and then it struck him. "They're mirrored."

"And polarized. Hopefully they'll disrupt the basilisk's gaze as I have no desire to die. Petrified I can live with, dead I can't."

"Excellent idea." Snape looked around and then transfigured his own pair from a bit of toilet tissue. He grabbed enough that when they reached the bottom they made enough pairs for everyone.

To offset the now stygian darkness Harry pulled his wand and cast "Solarius". They proceeded cautiously through the tunnel pausing briefly when they found the shed basilisk skin. The goblins were very excited by the skin. Harry politely demanded of the youngest and lowest ranked goblin there what they were so excited about and he explained.

"A basilisk is a very magical creature. The venom is the most toxic in the world but it is very valuable in potions. The bones and teeth can be used for potions and for wands. Its heartstrings are fewer but are as useful for wands as a dragon's. Some of the other innards have uses but most of the meat is useless we will burn it and vanish the ashes. While its scales have many uses the skin itself has only one but that one use surpasses all others. You have heard of Dragon hide armor, yes?"

"Yes."

"Well, shed basilisk skin is superior to even the best Ukrainian Ironbelly hide. In addition to being much lighter and more flexible, it can resist thirty times the spell damage of dragon hide. The size of that skin alone is enough for four whole body suits and it is very possible there are more skins down here. It would be a great thing, very profitable."

At this point the goblins indicated they were ready to move on, so the group continued. Then they reached **a solid wall on which two

entwined serpents were carved, their eyes set with great glinting emeralds.

Harry approached, his throat very dry. He knew what he had to do. He cleared his throat and he hissed "~Open.~"

The serpents parted as the wall cracked open, the halves slid smoothly out of sight. Despite their fears the group walked inside.

They were at the end of a very long dimly lit chamber, Towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents rose to support the ceiling lost in darkness casting long black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that filled the place. In the distance you could hear the occasional drop of water from condensed air hitting a puddle in the cool room.**

"Slytherin's fabled chamber!" came Flitwick's excited squeak.

Harry supposed it was supposed to be exciting but in his mind this room was eerie and unpleasant. He stepped forward. "Let's just get this done."

"Quite," said Albus.

They kept together at first until they were sure the basilisk wasn't in the immediate vicinity then they spread out to explore.

Albus was frustrated. He had supposed there would be more to Slytherin's fabled chamber than this.

Severus Snape was likewise annoyed; he had always attributed the best to the founder of his house. Pride had its place, but this was just self-aggrandizement on the scale of a Gryffindor. He found himself somewhat disappointed in the founder of his house. Looking at the statue of Slytherin's head, he called to Harry, "Potter, is there anything on the walls that would indicate more rooms off this one?"

Harry walked over to the outer walls and looked. "I don't see anything, sir." Harry continued to look when he neared the statue of Slytherin he heard it. "I can hear the basilisk," he said.

"~ Who has entered my master's chambers!~"

Harry wondered, as he could almost feel a thrum in his chest, if basilisks spoke on an infra- sound level it would explain him being able to hear it through the walls, as he had early in the year.

"~I failed Salazar, my first master. He punished me by leaving me alone here so long. But I will not fail his heir. I will kill the muggleborn. I will drive them far from here.~"

The tone was distinctly deranged. Harry felt pity for the creature. It sounded like centuries locked up alone had driven the once intelligent creature insane . Harry didn't realize it but he hissed "~I wish it would speak to me. Slytherin was a clever man, if a touch egotistical.~"

"~Speaker~"

The mouth of the statue began to open, a large forked tongue flicked out tasting the air. "~Not of his blood or in his control!~"came an enraged hiss.

"OH shit!" Harry exclaimed.

Snape, who was standing nearest to Harry and had seen the tongue and heard the exclamation, grabbed Harry and pulled him out of the way while shouting, "ALBUS!"

Minerva turned to look, only to look right into the eyes of the basilisk as it exited the mouth of the statue.

Albus conjured a cock that he compelled to crow immediately, slaying the great serpent. Remus, Flitwick, and Sprout looked at Minerva and realized that that could have been them had they been at a different angle to the statue.

Professor Sprout moved over to the woman she had worked with for nearly forty years. She examined her. Tears of relief sprang from her eyes when her examination allowed her to say, "Only petrified, thank Merlin."

Albus stood there, relieved. "It appears Mr. Potter, we owe your sunglasses idea a great debt. We still have our deputy thanks to it."

"No thanks necessary, sir." Harry said offhandedly as he pulled away from Snape, and levitated the last four feet of the serpent's tail away from the mouth of the statue to look beyond it.

Snape figured that it must be the sense of immortality that typifies young people that allowed Harry to do so. Because he, himself, was still trying to convince his heart that it didn't need to leap out of his chest, and his bowels that they didn't need to dump in his trousers.

The goblins having realized a close call when they saw one, made up their minds to mention the youngster's courage and the fact he had protected the group, including the goblins, to their leader. Wizards with that attitude in the past had been named goblin friend. It had been more than a hundred years since there had been a goblin friend, but it never hurt to mention promising young wizards.

Harry looked into the room behind the statue. In addition to more shed Basilisk skins there were shelves of dust covered books. "Jackpot." He cast one of the basic detection charms they had learned in Defense this year. There was a spell, but if Slytherin's other passwords were anything to go by he figured this one would be equally simple. "~Disable.~" Harry checked again. It was gone. "Sweet."

He moved into the room it was a third of the size of the outer chamber but still big enough for the fifty foot snake.

When Snape saw him go through the open mouth, he wanted to swear. Sometimes that boy acted entirely too much like his father and others of his ilk. He promptly followed only to pause in the opening as he spotted the library.

Albus, having assured himself of Pomona's diagnosis, saw Severus in the opening and went over to join him. This was more like it, he thought as he spotted the books.

Harry spotting the Headmaster's bright robes in the opening said, "These will have to be cataloged carefully . The basilisk is valuable but this is priceless."

"Indeed, dear boy, yes, most definitely indeed. Perhaps while the goblins and Severus see about harvesting the basilisk you , Remus, Filius, and I can see about doing exactly that. Severus I have asked

Pomona to see about taking Minerva back up to the infirmary so if you wouldn't mind ..."

"Of course, Headmaster."

The next several hours were spent working. The books were handled carefully; the teachers named titles and authors, cleaned and carefully packaged the books into crates for transport while Harry played scribe. Meanwhile Severus counted, weighed, measured and noted the basilisk parts and made sure all relevant parts were collected. The goblins used his signature as a counter signature to their own so neither side could claim cheating later. As the last books were cataloged the goblins came and collected the skins once again noting the find. At the end they had Albus look over and sign the declaration.

"Now, Headmaster, how are the funds to be divided? We goblins get fifteen percent for our work here today and for handling the sale as per the agreement. How is the rest of the funds to be divided?"

Albus sighed, " The rest is to be divided as follows: ten percent to Harry Potter, the remaining seventy five percent is to go into the Hogwarts fund. However when Gringotts does the billing for next years tuition the following students are to receive credit equivalent to three percent of the value each applied to their bills: Neville Longbottom, Hermione Granger, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbott, Michael Corner, Ernie MacMillan, Daphne Greengrass, Tracey Davis, Blaise Zabini, and Harry Potter."

"So a net forty-five percent to Hogwarts then?"

"Yes."

"Sawshank," Harry surprised the goblin by addressing him by name. The goblins had addressed each other but they had not expected the wizards to notice or even care. "I would request that instead of galleons I get my ten percent in the form of goods not galleons, seven percent skin, the remaining three in potion ingredients including at least a dram of venom."

"Understood, Lord Potter." The goblins would definitely keep their eye on this young wizard. He clearly understood that some things were better than gold.

Harry, meanwhile, was trying to figure out where this mysterious ten percent came from. The only thing he could come up with was that his Head of House had asked for it on his behalf, which left him wondering what the man would want in return.

Chapter 38 Summer '93

Late the next day Harry's return trip to the Dursleys' was uneventful. He used his portkey to Potter Place then Cassandra escorted him as far as the Surrey Station close to Privet drive, where his uncle met him.

"Well come on, boy, I need to get home sometime today. I've got work in the morning."

"Yes, Uncle Vernon." Harry was very surprised his uncle had circles under his eyes like he wasn't getting enough sleep. "Are you okay, Uncle Vernon?" His uncle helped him get his trunk into the boot.

"Fine. Just not getting enough sleep."

Harry went to climb into the back seat of the car and was shocked to find a infant seat. After he got buckled he said, "Is there something you want to tell me?"

"Your Aunt will explain when we get home."

Harry felt very nervous. How on earth had Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon suddenly come into needing an infant seat in their car? They pulled into the driveway and they got his trunk out. Harry followed his uncle into the house. His aunt met them at the door she too had circles.

"Harry I'm glad you got back safely. Thank you for sending Hedwig so we knew not to meet the Express, did whatever it was go well?"

"Yes, Aunt Petunia."

"Good take your trunk up to Dudley's room. You both will be sharing from now on."

"What?"

"Quiet! You'll wake the baby. Since you and Dudley are only here a few months out of the year We decided you boys will share and gave Rose your room. Don't worry we redecorated Dudley's room so you'll both fit. That trunk of yours was very handy in planning the space. Once you're done come back down and I'll explain."

Harry, still stunned, did as he was told. He was impressed by the way the space in Dudley's room had been planned. He was obviously intended to occupy the space around the loft bed there was just enough space for his trunk and Hedwig's perch along side the desk and chair under the bed. He wondered where his cousin was briefly. He was startled out of his introspection by the cry of a baby. He stowed his trunk and got Hedwig's perch set for when she made her appearance. Then he moved back downstairs figuring that would be the best place to get an explanation. He arrived in the kitchen just as Aunt Petunia finished setting dinner on the table. Vernon entered carrying a baby wearing a pink sleeper. He placed her in a baby bouncer seat that was set on the table.

"Where's Dudley?"

"He's spending the night at a friend's. Now Harry I wish to introduce you to someone. This is your cousin Rose. She was born three weeks ago."

"But I thought you and Uncle Vernon couldn't..."

"We haven't. Rose's birth mother is a young friend of mine from the dance studio, she got in trouble. Her parents wanted her to abort the baby. She gave her to us instead. The adoption should go through next month."

"Okay. Do you need any help with anything?"

"Yes, tomorrow when Dudley comes back we will need to discuss summer plans."

After dinner Harry did the dishes while Petunia played with and doted on the baby. Harry was surprised by how happy his aunt seemed despite her lack of sleep as she gave Rose a bottle and burped her.

At ten the next day when Dudley got home, Harry understood why his aunt and Uncle looked tired. Rose apparently liked to be awake at night. He had woken when she cried at one, for such a tiny mite she sure was loud. Harry was unable to fall back to sleep until his aunt finally got Rose back to sleep around four. He groaned when

his alarm went off at six. Harry knew that with his uncle's commute to work he'd need breakfast and a lunch made, force of habit had him rising and heading to the kitchen despite his own lack of sleep.

He'd made breakfast, and a lunch for his uncle, who actually gave him an appreciative "thanks"

before leaving for work. Then he'd gone out and weeded the flower beds before it got hot. When Dudley got home , the two boys exchanged greetings.

"Lo, Harry."

"Dudley."

"How was school?" They said together then both boys smiled.

Dudley was the first to speak again. "Smeltings was fine, cadet force is grand. How was your school year?"

"It was okay. I got to meet a friend of my father's. He was a good teacher. I hope he's back next year, but I don't count on it."

"Anything interesting happen?"

"I got to twist Dumbledore's knickers in a bit of a knot a few times over the course of the year, but nothing much. You?"

"Well other than the shock when I got home, not much. I pretty much maintained my position in my class so I'm happy."

"That's excellent, I'm happy for you. Sorry for barging in on your room and all."

"It's okay. I can understand mum's reasoning: we're both boys, neither of us is home for longer than a couple months, makes sense to move us together so she's got a room for Rose. So what do you think of my baby sister?"

"She's cute, but she's loud."

"No sleep last night?"

"Not really, no."

"Why do you think I spent the night at Jace's last night? I foresee weekly sleepovers at my friends' houses all summer."

"I see, method to your madness. It's a pity I can't do it over the summer because I learned the perfect spell for this situation this year."

"Any plans this summer?"

"My next belt test, then I've got a class on land & portfolio management with Felicia and a class on wizarding law at the ministry, plus my usual homework. Oh, and time spent studying my family magics. Helping out around here, probably helping with a class or two at the dojo...Not much."

"There are times when I worry about you, cousin. Hasn't anyone told you summers are for relaxing?"

"What about you?"

"Well there's a couple weeks where my cadet force group is supposed to go train, and a small bit of homework but for the most part that's it. Mum and Dad plan to stay put this summer since Rose is so little."

"Shall we help your Mum and figure out a chore chart? Divvy up the work as much as we can?"

"Yeah, but when you plan for laundry, plan for four more loads. Babies are very messy little things, I'll have you know."

"Has your mum made you change any diapers yet?"

"Yeah, the just pee ones I don't mind, but the rest- disgusting."

"I'm with you there."

As the weeks of summer progressed Harry came to both love and hate his little cousin. He loved her because she was sweet and innocent. She made his aunt happy. The times he had charge of her made him happy and it wasn't long before she had him wrapped

around her fingers. He hated her because she was even less of a blood relation than he was, but she was doted on, by everyone even Aunt Marge.

Aunt Marge, who had come for the baptism, had taken a few days to warm up to Rose. She had questioned Uncle Vernon as to how he could take in someone not of his blood and love her so well.

His answer had caused Harry to develop a bit of sympathy both for Rose and Aunt Marge. "Marge, Rose's mother is a sweet girl who reminds me of you a bit. You see Rose isn't just any baby. Rose's mother is pretty, sweet, and naïve. She reminds me of you when you were a girl. You remember what happened to you, don't you? How Lord Brierton's son took you out, romanced you, and then didn't listen when you said, 'no'.

"Well Melody was dating young Viscount Waverly, and the same thing as what happened to you happened to her. She got pregnant from a date rape. When she told him, it was in a restaurant where I sometimes take clients. I saw and heard what that little prick said to her. Were I her father I'd have gone after that toe rag and given him a good hiding. Her parents wanted her to kill the baby same as ours did yours , but she said "no". So they kicked her out. Petunia was volunteering at the hospital the day she went in to get an abortion because she didn't think she had a choice anymore. She knew Melody from the dance studio and she could see that she didn't really want to kill the baby. So we gave her a choice, she moved in with us until after Rose was born then she went back to her parents.

"I know you drink to forget. It has damaged your life, what Mother and Father made you do. Melody is young she deserves better, just like you deserved better. Pet and I took Melody in while she was pregnant and we've adopted her daughter because Petunia has always wanted more children and I couldn't help you but I can help Melody. I could do something to prevent another young girl from feeling what you have felt all these years. Come on, have a good cry then you'll feel better."

The sound of Marjorie Dursley's tears was enough to startle Harry back into motion.

Harry went through the days keeping busy, but he resented how his uncle and even his aunt doted on the baby while he was mostly

treated as an unwelcome guest/ and sometimes servant. It wasn't as bad as when they weren't getting the stipend but it still rankled. He was their blood relation but they didn't love him because he had magic. His stomach burned with fury at Albus Dumbledore for putting him in this house, and at his Aunt and Uncle for not loving him. Before Rose, he had told himself it was because he wasn't their son, but now that Rose was here that excuse wore thin. Harry redoubled his efforts in his magical world studies.

Harry's sensei was concerned. He saw Harry's emotional turmoil and was afraid for Harry's mental health. One day he cornered him.

"Care to tell me what has got you so worked up?"

"I...No, Sensei, it's stupid. Talking about it won't change anything."

"Sometimes if we unburden ourselves we can lighten the load. I'm concerned, Harry. You come back from your boarding school you're just here for the summer and you're wound so tight I'm afraid you'll snap. Add to that you had me ask Samantha about books for rape victims that are boys. Is there something you want, or need, to tell me?"

Harry got a shocked look on his face as he realized what his sensei was thinking. "What? You thought? Ooh, um, oh boy. First off, Sensei, um those books really weren't for me. See this last year there was a teacher at school. He tried, well... what you're thinking but not with me, but with another student. I stopped it, kicked his ass while I was at it. But the other boy, it was all but done and it messed him up badly... his family has hang-ups about... well, you know, psychiatric care I wanted the books for him not me. No, the reason I'm so ...

After a moment of silence Sensei prompted Harry. "Is?"

Harry felt like a girl as tears sprang to his eyes. "My family doesn't love me. They tolerate me, if I'm useful. Sometimes I think everyone views me that way. I hate it. Sometimes I hate myself. I really hate myself when I look at little Rose and feel so angry and resentful. She's so sweet and perfect. But I get so angry at her.."

"She's got what you want, your aunt and uncle's attention and affection and you're jealous."

Harry, blushing in shame, nodded his head.

"There's not a lot I can tell you, Harry. The lack isn't in you, it's in your aunt and uncle. You are an incredible and special child, with a huge heart. You're smart and you have an almost limitless potential. You always have. You don't think I asked you to help here in the dojo as a nine year old because I pitied you?"

"Didn't you?"

"Harry, I gave you a job here because I knew even then that you were honorable and I saw your enormous potential. I wanted a part of shaping that potential. It's not every student I teach survival, or astronomy, or code-breaking, or go to. Most I teach them karate, that's it. I see you and I see someone with the capacity to be a renaissance man; someone who is solider, artist, scientist, and statesman. Such men are rare and their paths are seldom easy, but cream always rises to the surface. Don't let others force you down."

"Thanks, Sensei."

"It's my honor and pleasure, Harry. I hope with time you'll be able to put aside your negative feelings regarding your new cousin, and will come to love her as she deserves. If you do, the love you bestow will reap its own reward.

"Now would you care to spar?"

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Augusta Longbottom watched as her grandson and his best friend took the test that would determine how much they had absorbed of the wizarding government and law they had studied this summer.

It was the first of eight tests that Wizengamot members had to take before becoming eligible for their seats. The test served the purpose of making sure a person had knowledge of the lawmaking process, an understanding of the government and its structure. Future tests would make sure that Wizengamot members knew and understood the laws they swore to uphold while judging a case. Because the tests were difficult many chose to wait until after Hogwarts before preparing for them. Usually only people who wanted a job in the ministry or who stood to inherit seats on the Wizengamot bothered

to take them at all. Aurors were required to pass this the first test and all six regarding the laws. Ministry workers, except janitorial workers, only had to pass the first. Although adults could take the classes and spread them out as long as they wanted, youths had to do them in the summer or if they were in sixth or seventh year at Hogwarts. Many families did not bother to have their children prepare to take the tests. Hogwarts offered a preparation class for the first test as a NEWT course spreading the study over one year.

It had been decided amongst the trustees that in addition to Felicia Corner teaching Harry estate management over the summer they would have Harry take the first of the courses for the wizarding government. Tiberius had smiled and said, "Young Harry is smart, but he's also a bit cocky and some would even say arrogant. The test will either give him grounds for pardonable pride or kick some of that arrogance out of him."

Lady Augusta- little as she wanted to admit it- agreed. Harry was a bit much at times. Better to let something like this bring him down a notch or two. Little had she known Neville would insist on joining Harry in his summer studies. She had been surprised when Neville had written her in January and asked to take the classes with Harry, although on reflection she should have expected it. Before Harry, Neville had been timid and easily ruled. Now he was bold and driven. She had written him back and told him he could pick one of the classes to take for certain but if he wanted to take both he would have to place in the top ten of his year group. Shockingly Neville had pleased and surprised her by placing eighth in his year group this year at school. It had been with trepidation she had signed Neville up for this class. Unlike the House of Potter that had no trained Regent, that needed Harry ready as soon after his majority as possible, she acted as regent for the House of Longbottom. She just hoped this heavy schedule Neville set for himself didn't not knock him down the way she feared it would.

Augusta didn't know which she wanted more for them to pass or for them to fail. She hadn't seen much of Neville this summer. He had the class at the ministry four and a half hours four mornings a week, He spent afternoons either at Felicia Corner's office or in the Longbottom library with the portraits of the family heads. She rarely found him relaxing by puttering around the greenhouses, and he usually retired to his room straight after supper to study unless it

was one of the two nights a week that he portkeyed to a nook near the dojo where he studied karate.

Karate there was another point. Neville used to be prone to nervous fits and night-terrors. She had had her doubts about signing him up for the lessons last year. It had only been the annual healer's visit before school last year that had reassured her. The healer had said Neville had now calmed and was one of the healthiest children she saw. That Augusta should keep doing whatever it was she was doing, because Neville was obviously thriving.

She looked back at the classroom. Harry and Neville were the youngest two in the room and there were only seven students total. Most of them were either in sixth year or seventh year. Odds of the two boys passing this test on their first try were very slim. Even in adults who took it most didn't pass until their second or third try. She, herself, hadn't passed until her third try. She wondered if any of the seventh year students were on their second try. Two hours later the boys finally exited the room both looking rather drained. "Let's go get some ice cream." She suggested.

They flooded to Diagon Alley and then headed to Florean Fortescue's. Harry ordered a peanut butter fudge sundae for himself while Neville ordered a peach melba sundae. It was only after they had revived because of the sugar that they started talking.

"So Harry how do you think you did? Fantastic as usual?"

"Not sure Neville. What about you?"

"I think I just might've passed, thanks for suggesting that I practice drawing out the various ministry departments like a web and listing the duties of each department under each one. It made it easy for me to picture it in my mind so when that question rolled around I didn't have any trouble. The only one I have any uncertainty on is the steps for making new laws I think I got them all but I'm not positive. You probably did fine cause isn't it you at Hogwart's, that always is so uncertain after a test only for the results to come back and you do great? I mean you placed like third or was it second in the class this year."

"Fourth, Lockhart autumn term really messed me up."

"Yeah he was a git. I really wonder what happened to him anyway."

Lady Augusta had heard that the wizard in question was in Azkaban so she said as much.

To which Harry said, "It couldn't happen to a more deserving bloke," with enough rancor to make Lady Augusta's eyebrow raise.

She wondered what the man had done to earn such emotions from him.

"I need to go soon or I'll miss my train to Surrey. Lady Augusta, thank you for the ice cream and the pleasure of your company. See you tomorrow night, Neville. Sensei plans on doing belt tests next week, so go through your katas."

"Are we still on for school shopping next week?"

"I spaced it; not enough sleep I guess. But it shouldn't be a problem. Any ideas what electives you'll be taking?"

"None. But I know I need to decide this week. I was thinking Muggle Studies, and Care of Magical Creatures. What about you?"

"Arithmancy, Runes, and Care of Magical Creatures. My mum told me in a letter that Muggle Studies is not worth the time because it's so far behind the times. I'll probably show up and take the owl for it though since I grew up muggle it should be an easy OWL."

"I've heard arithmancy and runes are hard."

"I've heard that too. But I've also heard that they're dead useful. Besides it will be a challenge."

Lady Augusta couldn't help it. She snorted. If there was one thing she had learned about Harry, it was he loved a challenge.

"I can't wait to get back to Hogwarts. I'll get uninterrupted sleep again. Cousin Rose is cute but her habit of being awake at three in the morning is not."

"How sharing with your cousin been?"

"Not too bad, Dudley's a little sloppy at times but he isn't as bad as Malfoy. I pray I get Blaise as a roommate again."

"You Slytherins are lucky, two to a room. Us lions have to share with all our year mates."

"Poor you. Got to blaze or I'll miss-"

"Bye, Harry, see you tomorrow."

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Draco Malfoy had returned to Malfoy Manor in Wiltshire from Hogwarts.

His mother seemed relieved that he was now willing to eat his food without someone else testing it first and that he would sleep alone in his room. When she noticed he had reduced his potions use by half she had given him a faltering smile and said "I'm glad you are doing so much better."

His father had scowled at him but said nothing.

Draco knew he was a disappointment to his father. First, he didn't do well as well as his father expected him to do at school. Then there was the incident with Potter last year that had almost cost him his wand. Part of him wanted to cry and tell his father he was sorry, but he knew that would just disappoint his father even more. Then this year the incident with Lockhart, leaving him winding up owing Potter a debt of honor. The fact he had only placed twelfth in his year was the icing on the cake. Draco knew that he had better study the family rituals this summer until he could recite them perfectly or there would be hell to pay.

Draco had hidden the books his godfather gave him in his trunk for if his father found them he would undoubtedly hex Draco into wishing he'd never been born. But every night after the nightmares woke him, he would sneak them out and read them.

Severus had explained away his twice weekly visits to the Manor as advancing Draco in an area he excels at, and just wanting to spend time with his godson. During those visits they would talk. Most times they would start with mundane things, but sooner or later Severus

would draw the conversation around to the attack as they brewed potions. Most often what they brewed was the test potion Draco tested his food and drink with, but sometimes he assisted his godfather with brewing potions intended for the Hogwarts infirmary. Draco both loved and hated those talks. They were never comfortable but three weeks into them he could tell a difference, as the summer passed so did the frequent nightmares. He was shocked one morning to awaken and discover he had not had a nightmare that night. Which forced him to conclude that the muggles, while undoubtedly unobservant when it came to magic, were not the waste of space deserving nothing but death that his father so often proclaimed. If his father hadn't told him the truth where that was concerned, what other lies had he been told?

Draco knew his godfather was a safe sounding board for many of the questions being raised in Draco's soul, however he also knew that his godfather had been a Death Eater with his father. Draco was afraid to address those questions. He found himself wishing he were at school and sharing a dorm with Potter again if only so he could ask his many questions of someone whom he knew to be both neutral and honest.

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Ron Weasley had been thrilled when his parents had won the Daily Prophet Prize. It meant that they were able to both pay the St. Mungo's bill and get him a new wand. His had gotten broken in a freak accident when he tripped and fell getting off the Hogwarts Express.

The best thing about that summer was Bill and Charlie both took a week off and came home to check on Ginny. It was late one night when it was too hot for him to sleep, that he overheard a conversation between his father and Bill as he walked out near his father's shed.

"A Horcrux? But Dad that's like the darkest magic. I only know about them because we found one in a dig a year and a half ago. Harsclaw, the goblin in charge, recognized it and went a little crazy wouldn't let anyone touch it. He had the goblin wizards basically do the equivalent of fiendfyre on it. We actually lost some decent treasure that it had been touching. It was six months before I finally

convinced him to tell me what it was all about. You-Know-Who has made more than one?"

"The Unspeakables say that You-Know-Who probably made or tried to make seven of them." Said his father.

"And the diary was one?"

"Yes."

Ron heard his brother get up and start to pace.

"How did you find out Ginny had the diary?"

"The healers got an anonymous letter. I have it here if you want to see it. Someone who had talked to Ron and someone else who knew Ginny. Whoever it was pointed us in a direction and it allowed us to find the thrice blasted thing before it could complete what it was trying to do."

"So whoever it was probably saved Ginny's life and we Weasley's owe whoever it was a life debt."

"I'm not positive, but I think it quite likely."

Ron sat quietly down feeling a little stunned. The only person he had talked to besides his brothers after Ginny got hauled away was Harry Potter. A snake like him couldn't possibly have done something as heroic as save someone. Even if he did, a snake would never do such a thing anonymously; they would want to be known for what they did. After all, Slytherin was famous for ambitious people. Well there was only one way to find out for sure, he would have to read that letter.

It took him three days to find the letter. Once he read it he had to think who else would have known Ginny enough to comment then it struck him, Luna Lovegood. He disliked the somewhat fae girl, never quite comfortable with her tendency to talk about things that didn't exist since her mother died. But she and Ginny had been friends since they both wore diapers. He resolved to go and see her the next day.

"Luna."

"Ronald."

Ron stood in front of her unsure of what to say and how to say it.

"Have the Nargles got you?"

"What? No, I just wanted to ask... Well, I knew that you and Ginny were friends before so I wanted to ask..."

"Ginny's only friend at school was the diary."

Ron shivered. "Luna, this is important, did you tell anyone else that?"

"I told Harry that."

Ron felt both relieved and alarmed at her words.

Luna continued talking, ignoring Ron's reaction. "Harry is very nice to me. He stopped them from picking on me. He thinks I'm a little crazy, but most people do. He's not frightened by it though, which makes him different. It's almost like we're friends which is nice. I missed Ginny being my friend."

Ron felt like he should say something. "I think, Luna, that Ginny would be willing to be your friend again. She has been afraid that everyone will hate and blame her for what happened last year. I bet if you came over you and she could patch things up."

"I'll do that tomorrow then."

"Sounds like a plan. Um, thanks, Luna."

Ron went home and hemmed and hawed about what to tell his father. Finally after supper a week later he said, "Dad, can I talk with you?"

"Of course, Ron, what did you want to talk about?"

"Not here, in the shed."

Arthur Weasley was puzzled. The shed where he did his tinkering was magically expanded and heavily charmed for privacy. It was also where he handled matters of discipline so usually his younger children wished to avoid it. After they were in the shed, he turned to his youngest son and said, "What is this about?"

"Well, first, you should know, I overheard you and Bill talking about the diary. The shed door wasn't closed and I was walking because I couldn't sleep, and I heard you. Dad, I think I know who saved Ginny."

Arthur Weasley wasn't happy about his youngest having overheard that conversation but he also wasn't going to get mad about it. "And who would that be, Ronnie?"

"Harry Potter."

Arthur was surprised like many in the magical world he had written off the Boy-Who-Lived when the boy was sorted into Slytherin. Thinking it far more likely the boy was dark than the boy was someone good. "Why would you think that?"

"Well, you know how I like to play chess?"

"Yes."

"Well, Harry plays chess as well. He's very good actually. So we play chess in the Great Hall about once every two weeks. Anyway after they took Ginny to St. Mungo's, I wasn't well accepted in the tower and I found myself talking to him while we played. He's the only person I talked to other than the twins and Percy. When I heard about the letter I had to see it .When I saw what it said, I thought it must have been him,but to be sure I thought about who else might have mentioned Ginny. The only person I could come up with is Luna Lovegood, so I went and talked to her . She told him about the diary. He put together what I said about Ginny being possessed by unknown means together with what Luna said and-"

"Came up with how Ginny was being possessed." Arthur Weasley sat back in his chair. "Thank you for telling me, Ronnie."

"But dad, what should I do? I mean we owe him, but I guess I just feel really weird about it with him being in Slytherin and all..."

"He sent the note anonymously, Ron. So for now I think we should just act as we have. You continue to play chess with him next year and let matters rest." Arthur was pleased when Ron's face which had been somewhat screwed up with anxiety relaxed and the boy nodded.

"I can do that."

Ron left the shed. Arthur sat in his favorite thinking chair and thought about what he had just learned. Arthur was thought by many at the ministry to be a muggle-obsessed family man with very little ambition. Which he inwardly allowed was mostly true but one thing that most did not know about him was that his code of honor was absolute. He and his family owed Harry Potter a debt. As a Slytherin, the boy undoubtedly knew that. Arthur wondered when he would call it due and what he would ask for.

Arthur didn't wish to remain ignorant of Lord Potter. So over the next two weeks he made an effort to find out everything he could. He had read the transcripts of the trials determining Harry's custody. It had painted the Headmaster, the Leader of the Light, in a very unfavorable fashion. He heard stories from Percy about how the boy had violently attacked some students his first year and was almost defiant to Minerva McGonagall. On seeing the transcripts Arthur could understand why, the boy had to liking or trust for her. Fred and George were strangely close-mouthed about the boy, and now Ron's confusion about how he should treat the boy. Yes the Boy-Who-Lived was a puzzle and yet, despite his sorting, he didn't ally himself with families known for being dark. Arthur resolved to talk to Tiberius Ogden and Lady Longbottom sometime soon, since surely they knew more about the boy.

Maybe, despite all appearances to the contrary, the Boy-Who-Lived was indeed the Savior the wizarding world had proclaimed him after that long ago Halloween, but not the one they had assumed he'd be. Since You-Know-Who had made plans to return, it might be a good thing to keep an eye on young Harry Potter.

A/N: Long chapter for you all, the next will probably be kind of short as it will revolve mostly around Harry and his emotions. Ciao.

Chapter 39 Realizations

Harry woke up four hours late the morning he was supposed to meet Neville for shopping and wanted to swear. He hadn't realized how tired he was." Aunt Petunia, why didn't you wake me?" He said as he almost sprinted past her and Rose on his way to the shower.

"You've worked so hard and been so busy. I thought you deserved a bit of a lie in now that your summer courses are over." She said, shaking her head as the bathroom door closed on the last of her words. "It appears, my little Rosebud, that your cousin is in a bit of a snit. Let's go get you some formula, my precious flower."

Ten minutes later Harry was downstairs making himself some toast with strawberry preserves and pouring a glass of milk. Ordinarily he sat at the table, but today he ate standing near the sink and chugged his milk.

"Why are you eating like a mannerless lout?"

"Sorry, Aunt Petunia. I'm supposed to meet Neville and the rest of my friends in ten minutes at Diagon Alley we're doing our school shopping today?"

"What time are you supposed to be home?"

"We should be done by four I'd imagine, which means I'll probably be home by half six. Don't worry, I know it's my turn for supper. I'll pickup some take away from Rebecca's, alright?"

"Will Cassandra be with you?"

"No, Hannah Abbott's mum and Hermione Granger's parents are our adults."

"Alright, I'm sorry I didn't realize you had plans today. Have a good time, Harry." Petunia said to his back as he bolted out the backdoor. She shook her head. Her nephew had been so disciplined this summer. Even though Rose was prone to waking the household at night Harry had been up and made breakfasts and brown bag lunches most every morning before he left for his classes. He had come home late in the afternoon then had done chores around the house for an hour or two then he would study. As the summer had

progressed she had seen him get more tired looking which was the main reason why when he slept through his alarm this morning she had just left him to sleep himself out.

Harry quickly glanced around the backyard to make sure no one was looking out second story windows or over the fence before activating his portkey to Potter Place, He barely said hello and goodbye to Cassandra before ducking into the floo to go to the Leaky Cauldron. He arrived via floo just as Hermione walked through the front door with her parents. Harry politely greeted the Gryffindor.

Hermione said, "Mum, Dad, this is my friend Harry Potter. Harry this is my mum Dr. Emma Granger, and my dad Dr. Daniel Granger."

"Dr Granger, Dr. Granger, it is nice to meet you." Harry shook hands with both of them. "Thank you for supervising us today."

"It's our pleasure Harry. Hermione has told us so many stories. There's not much of this life we can share with Hermione but this we can do."

Neville came up beside Harry and said, "You're looking more rested but less put together than the last time I saw you."

"Yeah, well, sleeping four hours past your alarm does tend to do that."

Neville snickered then stepped forward for his introduction to Hermione's parents, the rest of the cadre arrived in ones and twos. Within five minutes everyone was there, and they moved into Diagon Alley itself. After the first stop of Gringotts the group spread out a little as they got their school supplies. Hermione got a cat. Harry thought it was an ugly thing, but it was obviously a familiar bond between the two. Harry was astounded at Flourish and Blotts' when Hermione bought the books for all the courses. Hannah, Tracey, Daphne and Susan all mimed the sign for crazy and when she saw it Hannah's mum swatted the back of her daughter's head. Harry was just glad that none of the Grangers noticed. He privately agreed with the girls but the lack of manners that was involved left him feeling vaguely ashamed of his own desire to snicker in agreement. The half the group that had gotten robes first headed to the apothecary for potion ingredients while the rest headed for robes.

Harry, who had shot up five inches since February, knew that he was only getting his school robes from Madam Malkin. He had already contacted Jack to meet in Hogsmeade to discuss new robes nearer to Christmas. Because everyone in the cadre knew what they wanted and where to get it they finished their shopping by three and went to Florean Fortesque's for a treat.

Once there the group just sat down and chatted. The children occasionally switching who they were next to until everyone knew what everyone else knew. After forty five minutes of this Susan said, "I'd like to make an announcement."

"A month ago at Gringotts there was a sale. It was a private sale offered only to golden cauldron level Potion Masters, wand makers and Ministries of Magic around the world."

"That's great, Susan, and this is important to us why?"

"Because this morning when my aunt opened the annual tuition bill from Hogwarts it showed this years costs paid in full and a twenty thousand galleon credit towards the next three years."

Daphne and Michael put it together first. "The basilisk!" they exclaimed.

"Uh huh. That's what I think."

Harry-who knew the value of his trust vault- thought about how much difference not paying his tuition this year would make, which for him wasn't much. Then he thought about about Ron, his brothers, and sister and what the dossier said about Arthur Weasley, one of the many on Ministry personnel, had said. "Gees, I didn't realize a basilisk was worth that much."

"Well there's the whole deadly magical creature thing, Harry." Tracey said.

"Yeah, I suppose."

Neville could tell his best friend was thinking hard. "What is it, Harry?"

"The Weasleys."

"What about them?" Blaise scoffed.

"They are poor, and because of what happened last year they might not have money enough for school this year."

"Serves them right." Daphne said.

Hannah and Susan both gave her a disgusted look.

"Really, Daph? Ginny Weasley deserved to be possessed by You-Know-Who? I personally don't think anyone deserves that." Aaron said the disgust evident in his voice. His tone changed as he turned to Harry and asked, "What are you thinking, Harry?"

"I was thinking of asking the goblins to shift some of my credit for next year over to the Weasleys."

Daphne said, "You can if you want, but myself, I wouldn't. Not after what the twins did to you first year."

Blaise nodded his agreement.

Harry frowned at the reminder.

Hannah spoke quietly, "I think ,Harry, that is a very noble idea. In fact I think I might do the same."

"Me, too." said Susan.

"Of course you Huffle-"

Harry snarled at Tracey, "Don't say it, no one says you have to, any of you. But leave stinking house prejudice out of it!"

Tracey turned red and looked at her lap, Daphne bit her lip "You're right, Harry." They turned to face the girls they had almost insulted. "Sorry, we've..."

"It's okay." Both the Hufflepuff girls said.

Susan continued, "Your families are Slytherin and after a summer of only being around that kind of thinking...wait, that sounds really prejudiced too. I'm sorry."

Michael-usually the quietest member of the group-said softly, "Scary isn't it, how much that kind of thinking dominates our society. Is it any wonder our world has so many problems."

"School doesn't help, not with the stupid house cup." Hermione said. "It would be different if the teachers gave points for cooperative efforts rather than encouraging one upmanship the way they do."

Harry couldn't resist a tease. "Neville, check my pulse. Did I just die and not realize it? I thought I just heard Hermione Granger criticize our teachers!"

Everyone in the group chortled as Hermione blushed but asserted, "It's true."

Blaise felt the alarm on his pocket watch go off . "It's gone four, it's been fun but I've got to go. See you all next week on board the Express."

The group headed back to the Leaky Cauldron. When Hermione realized Harry was headed to the Underground intending to take the trains back to Surrey she persuaded her parents to give him a ride. They discussed their summer homework and it was only as Harry climbed out in front of his Aunt and Uncle's favorite takeaway place five blocks from home that Hermione said,"Harry, if you give the Weasleys that money it shows clearly to me that all the trash that gets said about Slytherins is just that: garbage. You make a very clear case that it's the person not the house that matters. I admire you very much for even thinking about it, after all the things the Weasleys did to you first year. See you." She waved as her parents pulled away.

Harry went in, ordered, and paid for family sized helpings of the his family's favorite dishes then walked home. Dudley helped him set the table. Then they all sat down.

"So Harry, you are here for another week, your classes for the summer are over. What are your plans for the rest of the time? We

don't want a repeat of today." His Aunt asked after dishing herself some garlic mashed potatoes.

Harry passed her the pot roast before answering. "I'm staying here tomorrow until two. Then I go to the dojo and help Sensei set up and help administer belt tests. Tomorrow night I take my belt test."

Dudley who had kept track of Harry's karate ranking said "It's your black belt right?" before stuffing a forkful of broccoli salad into his mouth.

Harry smiled at his cousin, although Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon didn't really accept him, over the years he and Dudley had become good friends. "Yes, first degree."

"Are you excited?" he asked after swallowing the salad.

"A little nervous actually. It's kinda hard to advance when I'm only able to work with Sensei a few months a year. But he says I'm ready for this."

"And then?" Aunt Petunia asked.

"The day after that I meet with Cassandra, Mrs. Corner, and Barchok. We go over portfolio stuff. I do my annual visit to my parents' graves in Godric's Hollow. Cassandra and I plan out her tasks for the year et cetera, that's likely to take all day. I've already done my visits with," Harry stopped himself from saying Mediwitch and wizard. "Drs. Chang and Shingleton so I'm ready to relax. The day after that, Dudley and I want to deal with shopping for school. We figure we can take care of it, if you give us the money that way you won't have to pack Rose up too."

"Well I don't know...You boys are both so young. What do you think, Vernon?"

Vernon looking up from his dinner said "They've got good heads on their shoulders. If they both show us a list of what they'll be getting I don't see a reason why they couldn't. It's not like our Dudders can't protect them from people of ill intent. Isn't that right my brilliant boxing champion? I'll want to see your lists tomorrow night boys. Okay?"

Dudley rolled his eyes at Harry knowing that between the two of them Harry was likely the more lethal. Harry smirked back, while they both said "Yes, sir."

"And after that?"

"Mostly kick back, sketch, take naps while Rose sleeps. All my schoolwork is ready to hand in and I won't find out the results of my ministry test until after September 1st. I'll pack the thirty-first and I plan on portkeying to Potter Place and taking the floo on the first."

"I'd rather take you to King's Cross on the first. I've already got a babysitter for Rose, so there should be no discussion."

"Yes, Aunt Petunia." Harry knew better than to argue. Although with as out of sorts as he was with his Aunt and Uncle, he really would rather travel by himself to the station.

Two mornings later Harry and Hedwig met Cassandra at Potter Place and they flashed to Gringotts where Felicia Corner and Barchok met them. They went to one of the conference rooms.

Barchok handed Harry and Felicia both a thick statement. "The Potter accounts such as they are."

Harry went over the basic money account, noticing that the three percent of the basilisk worked out to be a little over twenty-eight thousand galleons. "Barchok, I would like to transfer half the credit balance on my Hogwarts schooling account to the Weasley family to be paid over the next three years. Would that be possible?"

"Lord Potter, are you sure? It's a substantial amount."

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Why?"

"Because the monster in the chamber affected their family as much as it affected Collin Creevy or Justin Finch-Fletchley, They deserve compensation. I thought I read that Hogwarts reimbursed those two families for last year's tuition."

"That is true. Very well. It shall be done. Your ten percent has been catalogued and put into a stasis vault you have two drams venom, and half a pound of bone, and a quarter pound of innards and approximately sixteen square yards of skin, sufficient for two full adult suits of armor. However unlike dragon hide which can be shrunk slightly Basilisk skin armor cannot be spelled at all."

"Alright then, it should stay where it is for now. I'm just starting to get my growth. There's no point to using it before I'm grown."

Felicia who had heard about three percent of a basilisk from her son felt her curiosity piqued. "What is the ten percent from, Harry?" She almost snickered as a grimace crossed his face.

Harry leaned forward for a moment and deliberately banged his forehead against the table, twice. He let out a groan. Then he peered at her with a pleading expression in his emerald eyes from behind his tousled bangs. "Do I have to tell you?"

"Yes."

Harry sighed and sat back up. He looked at the two women. They already knew more than most about him. "Barchok, can this chamber be silenced?"

"Yes."

"Do it."

There's a five galleon fee-

"Fine, just do it."

Barchok went to a panel across the room and pressed a pattern in the crystals on the wall.

"It's done."

"I want an oath that what I am about to say stays secret. Magical Oath that you tell no one without: first, my permission and second, an oath from them that they will tell no one without my express permission. Felicia, you have my permission to tell the other trustees

but only in a secure room and only after you've gotten an oath. This could be very bad for me if it got out."

The three others in the room didn't hesitate but quickly gave their oaths.

"I'm a parselmouth. I'm not completely sure how that happened. I'm betting You-know-who's attack on me is why. Cassandra, that's your task for this year. I've heard of a dark spell that allows for family magics to be stolen if the caster ends a family line. I think he intended to steal the Potter family magics but when I or my mum did whatever we- she did, it backfired and I got the Slytherin magics instead. I want you to find out what you can about the spell HE used and since I seem to have gained the Slytherin magics I also need you to find out what they are besides the obvious that is."

"Got it." Cassandra said.

"So that's how they got into the Chamber, and why you got an additional ten percent." Felicia said.

"Yes."

"How come we, I mean your trustees, weren't consulted? You took a risk. A basilisk isn't a crup."

"I didn't think about that, and I doubt Dumbledore thought about it. I went down with Dumbledore, the Hogwarts Heads of Houses, the defense professor and half a dozen goblins. Rarely was I in the front of the group and I came up with protection in the form of mirrored sunglasses that kept us from being in danger of dying. As it was only one person even got petrified." Harry smirked slightly as he thought of the proud, stiff-necked, deputy headmistress in her petrified state. "So it really wasn't a big deal. I just hope I get access to the books we found."

"Books?" Cassandra queried.

"Yes, Cassandra, about ten crates of them, including things by the founders themselves." Harry smirked as Cassandra's eyes glimmered and her jaw dropped slightly. He noticed Felicia too looked intrigued.

"How many books, Harry?" Barchok asked.

"Um, probably seven hundred or so. Didn't the other goblins say anything?"

"Different department," said Barchok.

Felicia looked at Harry, "They wouldn't have found them without your help?"

"Yes, before I told them I was a parselmouth, they were going to brick over the entrance to that bathroom."

"Well, I think I will be able to guarantee that you will get access." Felicia said, already planning on what arguments the firm could use.

Harry smiled. he didn't put stock in prophecy. But if Dumbledore was right and Voldemort put stock in prophecy; knowing what the older wizard knew might be key in defeating him. "Thanks. Now can we get back to the statement?"

They went over the rest of his statement which reflected the changes in his stock portfolio. Harry was pleased to see a five percent increase in his ownership of wizarding media. Half an hour later Barchok finished with "An overall increase in value of 75 % counting the basilisk parts and all investments are now showing a return."

"I am pleased, Barchok. Felicia, any comments or questions you would like to make?"

"About the finances, no, Barchok, you and Gringotts have done your usual through job. However Harry, I do have something to say to you. If you ever-"

"Risk myself? Felicia, calm down take a deep breath. Yes, I took a risk but knowing I could speak to snakes, knowing I had a plan to disrupt the snake's gaze, knowing who I took with me to the chamber do you really believe I took a foolish risk?

"You get out of bed in the morning; it's a risk. Who knows? You might slip and fall on the stairs and break your neck. Is it likely? Not really, but the risk is still there. Does it stop you from getting out of

bed in the morning? No, because you judge the risk to be an acceptable one. This is the same thing. I knew the risks. I did what I could to minimize the risks and went forward. I am sorry if you aren't comfortable with that but I did what I thought was correct."

Since his revelation it had slowly sunk into Felicia Corner what Harry had done. Now she wanted to cuff Harry the way she would her own son, for taking such a risk. She took a deep breath. On reflection she supposed Harry was correct, living life involved risks. At least he hadn't gone into the situation without thinking. He had made plans to reduce the risks involved in the undertaking and he had carried them out. She supposed the old adage it is better to apologize than to ask permission applied to the situation as well. Finally though, she gave in to her emotions and gave him a cuff to the side of his head. "That is for risking yourself. If I hear of you doing something like this again, I will turn you over my knee, is that understood, young man?"

"Ow! That hurt! Fine. Understood. Gees!"

Barchok was smirking as the four of them rose to their feet and gathered themselves to leave the room. He dropped the privacy wards. Then he watched as the three humans left Gringotts.

Felicia returned to the office. Cassandra and Harry went to The Leaky Cauldron where they had engaged a private room for lunch.

After they ordered and their lunches were delivered Cassandra started to talk. "How much of the dossiers have you had a chance to read?"

"Not much. I've skimmed about half the ministry files I started with the thin ones mostly because I've had only five minutes here and there."

"That's fine. Be sure and leave yourself an hour or four when you get to Dumbledore's. Minister Fudge's is pretty thick too."

"Dirt?"

"By the ton. I'm still working on Tom Riddle's. He seemingly vanishes around 1948. But there's no death record."

"That's because he became Voldemort."

Cassandra was so shocked she swallowed wrong and began to choke.

Harry was swift to do a Heimlich maneuver, and apologized. "Sorry, should've timed that better."

"That's okay," she said in a raspy voice. "Guess that gives me a continuation point."

"Has anyone noticed you digging?"

"Maybe, but I don't think so. Having my dad announce to all the wizarding world that I'm a disowned near squib, people pretty much like to pretend I don't exist. I've used the monies you provided me with to find stuff buried in ministry files. I swear the people that work at the ministry don't even realize half of what is there. I pay a small amount to do research in their files and I find stuff that should be in some kind of secure storage but it's not. Not a mistake I'm making. I contracted the goblins via Barchok. Everything I do for you and everything that falls in the category of come back and bite your ass is in a vault at Gringotts or is securely spelled by goblins to be for eyes only to you and me. Everything else is password protected in a secure vault at the manor, not even Felicia knows all of what is there. You wouldn't believe some of what I've found. I've stayed really discreet. Some stuff I duplicated and sent on; stuff I figured would be helpful if the trustees knew. But I only sent them information that either it's important they knew for your best interest or that wouldn't affect you as far as I could tell. It was found by a combination of public record, and connecting dots. Most the dirt I found on Dumbledore, I found just by listening to an old, lonely lady, Bathilda Bagshot. Mind you I double-checked what she said from other sources but still."

"As in History of Magic Bathida Bagshot?"

"Uh huh."

"Huh. Great job. How goes the mail backlog?"

"Done, people looking for endorsements are no longer beating a path since they're being given a polite refusal; the stubborn ones I've

either turned over to the firm for harassment suits or I've sent on to you for consideration."

"Yes," Harry gave a wolfish grin, "Other than a charity or two, I sent them back an endorsement offer that would eat their profits completely. For some reason they lose interest. Go figure."

"Your godfather keeps sending stuff."

"He's a Gryffindor, it's not surprising. His next one, burn and send back the ashes."

"Harry, don't you think that's a little harsh?"

"He basically said my dad would be rolling in his grave about my being in Slytherin. Maybe that's so, I don't know. And we will never have a chance to know in this life. All I know is, he's one to criticize when he acted irresponsibly the night my parents were killed and he landed himself in prison. He lost his right to judge me with that mistake. I'm doing my best to be a good person and to live up to the expectations my mum set for me. I refuse to bend over and try to please everyone else in the wizarding world because I couldn't do it anyway. I'll settle for pleasing myself, selfish though that sounds."

Cassandra winced but she also understood where Harry was coming from. She also knew that while Harry voiced a hard line, he really cared about others and was very kind-hearted. "So is there anything else you want me to be working on?"

"Just the spell and the research into Slytherin family magics."

"England's dark libraries are mostly private. It might be hard for me..."

"Do your best, so far that's been more than enough."

Cassandra smiled. "I'm done. Are you ready for Godric's Hollow?"

"I need to stop at the florists, but almost."

Half an hour later Harry was in front of his parents' grave. He pulled the few weeds that had sprung up and tidied away old debris from last autumn and winter then he lovingly placed the wreath he had

purchased on the grave. Hedwig, resting on his shoulder, comforted him.

"Hi Mum, Dad. It's been a bit of a year. You'll be pleased to hear that I did well in school. Also that I finally fulfilled all your last wishes with regards to your things. Dad, I successfully cleared your friend, Sirius Black. He is no longer rotting in Azkaban.. I took it one step further and paid for him to get medical care for a year. I also finally met your friend, Remus Lupin. He's okay, a bit weak and easily led, but nice enough despite his affliction. Mum, I sorta made peace with your old friend. Don't really trust him but we aren't at loggerheads anymore.

"It's been pretty hard. Dad, I hate to say this, but you've got crap taste in friends. Peter betrayed you. Sirius rejected me. Remus danced around for months before finally speaking to me as something other than a teacher. McGonagall's been a prejudiced bitch. And it's not just life in the magical world that sucks, I have a new cousin she's sweet and all but when she's there it becomes so apparent that I'll never be good enough to be loved by Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon.

"My godfather's rejection of me because I am a Slytherin really hurt. It was like he could only see my robe and he couldn't be bothered to look beyond it. Never mind the Hat wanted to put me in Gryffindor, but I couldn't be a lion. You understand why right? I just couldn't knuckle under to the Headmaster. He's pulled so much shit, and so often it seems like I'm the only one who sees it. Sometimes part of me feels like you guys left me because ... because you knew how messed up I was and didn't want any part of it. I mean I know in my head that you didn't want things to be this way and it's not my fault...But sometimes it feels like it is, especially when I find myself alone or being looked at a certain way.

"Then there's all the times I find myself maneuvering others around almost like they're chess pieces. Part of me looks at myself and hates it, but another part says it's for the good of everyone. I try never to force them to do something that makes them unhappy." Harry sniffed hard fighting to keep the tears he felt inside. "At what point is it that I become someone like the Headmaster? Is it when I stop caring how my actions cause them to feel?"

"I...I just want someone to love me. I really wonder if I'll ever be good enough for anyone. I mean I have my friends, but are they my

friends because they like me or because I'm the Boy-Who-Lived? Neville likes me for me, I think. He even accepted me when he found out I was a parselmouth. But I don't know. Sensei cares but he can't know about my magic. Would he look at me the way Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon do if he did? My trustee board, they look after my interests but how much of that is because they want the influence that comes with it? I just feel so alone.

"I find myself wondering what you would say if you were here?"

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Arthur Weasley slowly walked up the stairs to the doors of Gringotts Bank. He was here to try and persuade the goblins into making him a loan so he could pay the Hogwarts bill for his five children. He had nothing to offer as collateral only his word that he would repay the loan. He had thanked Merlin the the Daily Prophet draw had come to him and his family. It had staved off this point for a few months but now the time was here. He got in line. He needed to know exactly how much he had, the total he knew he owed on tuition for all his children was galleons that was after the discount his family received because they had so many children. He knew that after the St. Mungo's bill he was probably twenty thousand galleons shy of what he needed.

"What do you want?"

"Um yes I was hoping to speak with someone about a loan."

Arthur felt a slight flush of shame as the goblin gave him a disgusted look. Goblins made loans but they always looked down on those who utilized those services.

"Hargut, take this man to Feldspear."

"Thank you." Arthur timidly followed the goblin to an office on the next level up.

Feldspear looked at the aged redheaded wizard in front of him.
"Purpose of the loan?"

"To pay my children's Hogwarts tuition."

"Amount needed?"

"I'm not sure." Arthur winced as the goblin glared at him.

"Let's find out shall we. Name?"

"Arthur Weasley."

The goblin's assistant moved out of the office at a run. Eight nerve wracking minutes later he was back and placed two folders in front of Feldspear. "Arthur Weasley, balance in account seventeen thousand one hundred and six galleons, twelve sickles, and fourteen knuts."

Arthur felt a slight hint of relief. He and Molly had done well in controlling their expenses. A thirteen thousand galleon loan while not good wasn't as bad as he had feared.

Feldspear opened the second file "Balance owed to Hogwarts on tuition for Percival, Frederick, George, Ronald, and Ginerva Weasley 13,575 galleons. Loan denied." He said as he snapped the file shut.

"That can't be right. The tuition and fees for my children is just over thirty thousand galleons."

Feldspear gave him a disgusted look. "Gringotts doesn't make mistakes."

"But how can that be?"

Feldspear flicked the tuition file open and turned it so Arthur Weasley could see the amount owed. "Tuition, fees, and boarding for five children at Hogwarts at 8,575 galleons per child equals 42,875 galleons, thirty percent discount for multiple children brings it down 12,862 galleons and eight sickles leaving 30,012 galleons nine sickles remaining . Over the last five days there have been deposits made towards the balance owed leaving a balance of 13,575 still to be paid. Will you be transferring the rest of the bill today?"

"I...Yes." Arthur wondered who had gifted his family with such generosity. "Who deposited funds was in one person or many?"

"There were seven deposits. As to who, I can't tell you that, Gringotts confidentiality."

"Of course. Thank you, Feldspear."

Arthur apparated home with a much lighter heart than he'd left with.

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Harry was quiet as he rode to King's Cross with his aunt.

"You've been very quiet all summer. Is there something you want to say to me?"

"No, Aunt Petunia." Harry knew she expected some statement of gratitude but the last thing he was feeling was grateful. A whole summer of watching Rose be treated the way they treated Dudley had just about killed all the feelings of gratitude he'd once felt. He decided to try anyway ignoring the sour taste it left in his mouth. "Thank you for taking care of me this summer." Mentally he added, "I'm sure the extra money came in handy, as did the extra hands to assign chores to." "I'm happy for you that Rose's adoption went through without a problem." He thought briefly of how he had basically lied to the social worker about his feelings about his new cousin, saying he was happy about her inclusion into the household.

"Yes, Rose is such a wonderful baby. She smiled at me the other day, you know-"

Harry tuned his Aunt out. On one level he was happy for her, she had always wanted a daughter, but her self-absorption into her own feelings and complete lack of care towards Harry this summer had really opened his eyes to the fact that his Aunt and Uncle resented him and if they had gotten their way all those years ago he would not be a part of their household now, blood relative or not. He resented Albus Dumbledore more than ever, but now he resented Vernon and Petunia as well. Looking back he was clearly able to see that while he had not been physically abused after his fifth birthday and his physical needs had been met, he had been emotionally neglected. His feelings had never once been in his family's consideration except as a way to manipulate him. Even Aunt Petunia's keeping him instead of handing him off to McGonagall was

more about maintaining her means of revenge against the Headmaster than about caring for him.

Finally they pulled into King's Cross. Harry was swift to pull his trunk from the boot and swifter still to wish his aunt "Goodbye, see you next summer. Thanks for the ride." He wasted no time in going through the barrier, mounting the train and finding a compartment where he could nurse his bruised feelings in private. He hoped that Hogwarts would be less eventful this year, he really felt like he needed a year of few demands to regain his equilibrium.

Chapter 40 3rd Year begins

Harry half-hoped his friends wouldn't find him on the train, he wanted quiet to think. He had always known his aunt and uncle didn't care for him. He'd made the assumption that it was based on him not being of their blood, but now he knew it was based on the fact he was magical. The questions were what did he want to do about it and what could he do about it...

Neville was swift to say his goodbyes to his Gran. All summer he had seen Harry most every day but he had watched as Harry had grow quieter and more morose with every passing day. He wondered what would bring his best friend back to himself. He got on the train and looked for Harry. He found him in one of the compartments that were very unpopular, the one next to the prefects. Usually those compartments were the last to fill because the students generally didn't want to get caught in their mischief.

"Finally, there you are!"

"Hey, Nev."

"Alright, what's wrong? All summer I've watched you become more down with every passing week. I've minded my own business but I can't stand this any longer. Tell me what's going on with you?"

"Nothing." Harry tried to lie.

Neville recognized it for what it was. "Bollocks, Harry. I know you didn't get enough sleep this summer because of your adopted baby cousin, but all summer I've watched you; it's like you're a plant that is being denied sunlight or water. Something is wrong. I care about you, you're like the brother I always wanted, please tell me."

Harry felt a prickle of tears in his eyes, but he blinked them back. "The death of a dream, Neville, a death of a dream is all."

Neville gulped. Harry was almost crying. He waved his wand towards the door of their compartment, sealing it with a basic locking charm. "Tell me. I swear on my magic it will go no further."

Harry sighed. Then he drew his own wand and silenced the compartment. "All my life I've dreamed of my Aunt and Uncle caring about me the way they did my cousin Dudley. I did everything they

expected of me, everything I could think of to please them. I thought that they didn't love me because I wasn't their son, because I wasn't born of them."

Harry paused, searching for words that would describe his thoughts and feelings. He was a little surprised to realize it was only Neville he trusted enough to be this open with. "I thought if I did what they wanted of me I could earn their affection. This summer made it clear to me that their dislike of me isn't because I am not theirs, but because I am magical. Nothing I ever do will be good enough for them to feel more than duty towards me. They will never love me. While Dudley and I are close and trust one another we will never be brothers because he is their child and I'm just the abnormal burden on the house, his parents don't care about me and there has always been a gap that stems from the inequalities between how we've been raised. To them I am nothing but a tool for revenge on Albus Dumbledore," Harry added in a barely audible mutter, "or a sometime servant."

Neville blinked. He and his Gran had their problems, but this was a whole new level of relational problems. "Why do they want revenge on Albus Dumbledore?"

Harry suddenly realized he had said more than he should.

Neville watched as his best friend closed up. Over the last two years he had gotten to know Harry very well. His Great Uncle Algie, Aunt Enid and his Gran had always put down his choices and assumed because he preferred working with plants that he was clueless about people but he wasn't. He knew for example that Gran had feared he had completely suppressed his magic in response to the attack on his parents and on reflection that was true to a degree. Neville had realized late last year when he met the Ravenclaw firstie, Luna Lovegood, that he was a bit of an empath. Empathy was a rare gift, one he had suppressed. He had shut himself down to avoid being overwhelmed by the emotions of the others surrounding him at home and at school.

Luna had bumped into him. "I'm sorry. I didn't notice you; your walls are very good. I normally sense everyone before we touch. I didn't know an empath could build walls. How did you learn?"

Neville had been shocked. "I-" He'd wanted to deny he was an empath, but after being around Harry who instinctively contained himself on an almost constant basis he had become more aware of how he could sense the moods of people around him. It also explained why he preferred plants; plants don't shove their feelings in your face. Through the meditation during tai chi and through the steady encouragement and faith Harry gave him, Neville had learned himself what was him versus what came at him from everyone else and how to block it rather than suppress his own magic.

"I wonder if I could learn it. I might have to get to know Harry more. But you might want to learn to make yours less like a stone wall and more like a benezoazian's membrane. That way you'll be less likely to be surprised and less likely to have it break down on you."

Then the girl had walked away. Neville had reflected on that encounter for weeks and over the summer he had consulted the family library and his ancestors. His five Greats grandfather had said,

"An empath really? How wonderful! I was one too. In the library should be a book my parents found, *Emotion, the Mind and Magic*. It's by Pernelle Bellefonte. It was out of print when my parents tracked it down so be careful as you read it. This should take precedence over the other family magics you intended to learn this summer since as you know-"

"Train first for bloodborn talents, then family magics, then magical talents."

"Yes, well done, my boy!"

Neville had read the ancient book. He had been astounded to realize that had his grandmother read this book years ago he would have been in a much stronger place already, but that thanks to the things that Harry had taught him that transferred, he had already mastered most all the basic exercises and was ready for the intermediate ones. The book was currently packed in his trunk.

He could tell that Harry was uncomfortable talking about his emotions. So when Harry froze, instead of pushing him to tell, Neville let it go. He sensed that to press for an answer would erode Harry's trust and letting it go would probably build it. "It's okay. You don't have to say."

Neville hadn't been shy without reason as a child. He had been swamped by the emotions of those around him. Harry's steady faith and trust in him had given him the sureness to find himself. Now it seemed he would be repaying the favor.

Harry's expression relaxed. "Do you know occlumency, Nev?"

"Only the smidgeon all purebloods know, which isn't very much. Occlumency is the only defense against legillimency. Not directly meeting eyes with someone unless you're willing to have them scan you. That it comes from organizing thoughts, memories, and emotions so those things don't control you. Cursory mental barriers. What I know isn't enough to stop a legillimence really but it's enough that a cursory scan by an ordinary gifted won't reveal anything. Of course to use legillimency without either a court order or a medical necessity order is highly illegal. It's also considered dark and it is nearly impossible to prove. Why?"

"I think it would be a very good thing to learn. In fact I've already started, I think I've learned all I can without a legillimence's help though."

Neville sat quietly for a moment. Then he said, "Do you have a legillimence that you trust?"

"I'm not sure."

"Then I would recommend some fairly binding and restrictive wizarding oaths if not an unbreakable vow to maintain your privacy, I'd be willing to act as bonder if you wish." Neville fought a grin as Harry's forehead wrinkled in puzzlement.

"I know about oaths, but I've never heard of a vow."

"Okay, how about I explain..."

When the train arrived at Hogsmeade station, Harry felt much more centered and less likely to fly to pieces. It had been a quiet trip, just him and Neville. As their tradition had formed over the last two years they had split their luncheons and only bought a few things off the cart. The rest of the cadre found and cornered them on the platform.

Then they cheerfully loaded themselves into the carriages for their return to Hogwarts.

On entering the Great Hall the cadre split apart and headed to their tables. Harry was surprised to see Flint at the Slytherin table. He wanted to see the prefect, and he noticed Marcus wasn't wearing a badge this year. He wondered when he would find out why Flint was at Hogwarts again this year. The firsties were brought in. Harry waited disinterestedly. As they were sorted he clapped politely for each of the ninety-seven students. Ignoring the glares from some of his housemates as he clapped for those sorted into Hufflepuff and Gryffindor as well as those in Ravenclaw and Slytherin. He vaguely wondered why this year's batch of firsties was so much larger than his class or the following one but supposed it had been a post war baby boom following Voldemort's first defeat. He mostly ignored Dumbledore as he gave his usual inane remarks. He glanced at the teachers table and noticed that Remus Lupin wasn't there. That was a pity, but he supposed the Board of Governors had probably gotten word the man was a werewolf and refused to renew his contract. Harry just hoped the heavy-set man, Jaxom Durrand, that was apparently his replacement was a decent teacher.

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Albus cheerfully played the genial, grandfatherly Headmaster, while on another level he was still thinking about how he could influence Harry Potter. His contacts at the ministry had informed him that Harry was already taking the beginning steps to assume his place on the Wizengamot which was a nuisance. Albus couldn't understand how Harry and his aunt had been so effective at cutting the strings he had put in place years ago to control the Boy-Who-Lived. After all they weren't raised in the magical world, their machinations should have failed against his own. He supposed he owed most of the failures to those annoying, money-grubbing vermin the goblins. If he had allowed them to be the financial trustees instead of sealing the wills perhaps he wouldn't be in his present predicament, hindsight always is 20/20.

He was very disappointed that Remus and the boy hadn't bonded more closely. It was frustrating that dealing with Harry had turned into such a chess match. Albus had found himself having used his pawns to no avail. Hagrid had put himself out of the game by shunning Harry after his sorting. The Weasleys had pretty much

done the same, not to mention the way the Weasley twins horribly pranked Harry first year. Although Ron might eventually be of use due to the chess games he and Harry played.

Albus had moved on to his more important pieces, McGonagall as a bishop had been a miserable failure. Remus had only been slightly more effective, at least Harry hadn't routed him completely. Albus would have liked to have Remus back again to teach but his own position with the Board of Governors wasn't quite as unassailable as it once was. There had been a motion to remove him completely for hiring a pedophile and then a werewolf to teach last year, and the attacks that the basilisk had made didn't help. Thankfully all was forgiven when he had proven that, he had no way of knowing about Lockhart and that in addition to a record number of defense OWLs and NEWTs students passing precautions had been taken concerning Remus. What had cemented the continuation of his contract however was the proof that the basilisk was gone and the increase in the Hogwarts coffers.

Albus contemplated whom he could use to influence Harry. Unfortunately the list was woefully short. He had only a small influence with Sirius, but then again Sirius had no influence with Harry anyway so it didn't matter.

He, himself, needed to build ties to the boy, but Harry was less than open to the overtures Albus had made so far. Unfortunately the queen in his little chess match between himself and Harry was shaping up to be Severus, and Severus had already stated to Albus, that ""Playing" him against the boy would be a very bad idea." Severus had come a long way from his "spoiled pampered brat" days when it came to Harry. Unfortunately the change didn't help Albus. How was he to gain Harry's trust so that he could lead the boy into fulfilling the prophecy was his biggest question. He wanted his interaction with Harry to be natural not forced, unfortunately the boy seemed to have other ideas.

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Minerva McGonagall took her seat at the feast following the sorting and was mostly quiet as she sat thinking. Her summer had been one of quiet reflection, she hadn't done her usual things because at her age being petrified and then un-petrified had left her with stiff aching bones and joints. It had taken Poppy and Severus almost all the

summer to fix the problem. But one thing the summer had made clear to her was how close she had come to dying. The only thing between her and death had been the conjured sunglasses of Mr. Potter's suggestion. As such, she owed him a life debt. She found herself suddenly understanding Severus much more clearly: it was an uncomfortable thing to owe a life debt to someone you disliked. She finally had admitted to herself her feelings regarding Mr. Potter. She didn't like him at all. He was too different from her expectations: she had expected a trusting, loving young boy, eager and curious, someone with all the best traits of both his parents. He was anything but what she had expected. He carried the intelligence of his parents, but he tended to be cold not warm. He was cynical, not trusting, and he had a way of looking at people that was cold and calculating. It made her nervous.

Some of her opinion she supposed stemmed from her own guilty conscience. She had failed Lily and James and that failure was hers and hers alone. As such she had resolved to treat Mr. Potter with more respect than she had in the past. Instead of watching him with mistrust, and assuming the worst because of his sorting. She would try to take the things he did and said at face value this year instead of with the suspicion and antipathy of previous years. Perhaps she would see something that would give her hope instead of the fear that she had been living with the last few years.

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Luna Lovegood sat at the Ravenclaw table. Her summer had been spent developing the blood born magic she had inherited from her mother. Instead of going on a creature search with her father she had spent the summer with her elderly great great aunt, the last living relative she had on her mother's side. Great Aunt Josephine had helped her to train her latent sight and empathy. It was a relief because she was no longer being completely overwhelmed by the things she saw and felt. Last year had been awful.

She supposed it was highly unlikely that she would be widely accepted by her peers this year, last year had made that fairly clear. At least this year she was friends with Ginny again, and there was always Harry.

Aunt Jo had confirmed what she herself knew, Harry would be hers, but it wouldn't be an easy path. Harry would put up a fight like a

prize winning salmon, but he would be worth it. The task that lay before him was monumental. Harry desperately needed someone to lighten his load.

Aunt Jo told Luna, "Be his friend, teach him to see with his heart, do what you can to cheer him. He will come to accept the destiny before him and all will be well. But you will have to be patient, it will be long road, Luna. He will fight himself. "

"Will it be worth it, Aunt Jo?"

"Love is always worth it, sweetheart. He will be worth the wait, and the tribulations. You must resist the urge to claim him, let him discover for himself what you can bring to him. Be his friend, the rest will come with time. His life hasn't been an easy one, he has built walls in self-defense to breach them you must-"

"First be his friend."

Luna smiled at the memory. Then she finally saw Harry. She noticed that Harry was wearing a very closed off expression. He had never truly been open but she wondered what hurt had caused him to close so completely. She would have to work at this much harder than she had thought.

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At feast's end Harry headed to the dungeons with the other Slytherins. He waited in the common room and sat through Snape's speech the first part about the rules was the same.

"I have office hours. If you need my help or advice, use them. In this dorm there are six - sorry seven - older students whose job it is to act as my eyes and ears and to enforce the rules. Elena Danforth and Sean MacKinnon are the seventh year prefects, Lyle Howith and Calliope Mulciber are the sixth year prefects, William Vessey and Danielle Reynolds are the fifth year prefects. Look to them as your example. They are joined by Marcus Flint, Marcus was the seventh year prefect last year and he is here this year to further his education in charms specifically in reference to brooms and broom design. As he is taking only a few classes he will be available for tutoring, more so than most of your elders. He will also be continuing to captain our cup winning Quidditch team, in addition to his

advanced studies with Professors Flitwick and Hooch. I expect you to respect him the way you would the prefects. If you need help with your classes they will help you find an appropriate tutor. First through fifth years, the prefects have your class schedules. Collect them then head to bed. Rest is a requirement for learning, as is eating, do both or suffer my wrath. Sixth and seventh years, see me. Good night."

Harry went to the hall where his year group's rooms were. He scowled when he found his name on the same door as Malfoy's. He sighed, and opened the door.

"Malfoy."

"Potter. Same rules?"

"Sure, why not? Are you still having nightmares?"

"Not so much anymore, my godfather found me some muggle books. We didn't tell my father, but they helped. I didn't bring as much with me this year hopefully that will help me not to drive you so barmy.."

"Yeah, alright. It's good the books helped." Harry swiftly set about settling in and forty five minutes later he was climbing into bed. Harry silenced his bed curtains and after setting his alarm clock he went to bed.

Draco was left wondering how Harry knew anything about the books he had read this summer.

The next morning Harry rose, and as he dressed Draco sat up and scratched his scalp. "Potter, why is it you rise so infernally early? Classes aren't for three hours yet."

"I work out with my friends."

"Why? I mean we're magical, a little potion a spell or two and we're perfect. No real work required. I mean it's one thing if it's quidditch, but you act as if you're a muggle."

"I like knowing my strength and endurance are real, not the result of a potion. I like knowing my strength, it saves me from biting off more

than I can chew. Finally I like how it makes me feel, it's a natural high, kinda like flying. See you at breakfast, Malfoy."

In the common room, he met a yawning Daphne. She had apparently taken his advice about getting some clothes more suited to exercise. Harry was very uncomfortable to realize his hormones had apparently woken up because Daphne in her workout gear looked extremely hot. He felt some relief when Aaron stumbled out of the door leading to the halls with the boys dorms and joined them.

"No Tracey?" Harry grew even more disturbed when his voice cracked for the first time.

Daphne snickered then answered, "She wants to get settled in first. She said she would start joining us next week."

"Fine."

"No Blaise?"

"He's joining us next week. Let's go."

Harry lead the way to the classroom they used. He smiled when he saw the rest of the cadre waiting.

Hermione noticed Harry wasn't wearing the brown belt he had worn the previous year, but instead his gi was tied with a black belt. "Did you get your black belt, Harry?"

"Yeah."

"Black belt, brown belt what does it matter?" Ernie said.

Neville decided to enlighten them all. "A black belt denotes a certain mastery in martial arts. I've earned three belts so far thanks to what Harry has taught me. But he's been working without a teacher most the time. That he got his black belt is really impressive."

"Neville is right," Hermione echoed. "Congratulations on your achievement. But black belt or not, I'll still get higher grades than you."

Harry grinned. It was good to know there were some constants in his life. Hermione's competitiveness when it came to grades was one of them. "You'll try." He challenged. "Let's start warming up."

Chapter 41

Three days into school the results from the first Ministry test arrived with the morning owls. Harry eyed his envelope nervously. He had been told by just about everyone that there would be no shame if he had failed. He however viewed that possibility as a personal affront, unfortunately he was also all too aware of how tired and out of it he had been on the test day.

Further down the table a seventh year who had taken the test for the second time over the summer had opened her results. She sighed and said, "Oh well, I still have the test offered here with the NEWTs before graduation."

Harry felt the lump in his throat grow. He wanted to have passed that test in the worst way. He had wanted to show his trustees that they weren't wasting their time helping him. While he was sitting there trying to work up the courage to open it. Hedwig arrived carrying the packet of presorted mail from Cassandra. Harry cheerfully removed it and fed Hedwig a piece of bacon, glad that he could avoid his results a little longer. He opened the packet from Cassandra. A letter from Lupin, another from Nicolas, Healer O'Shaunessy ...Harry was about to open that one when Neville came over.

"Harry ," Neville's voice held a quaver that puzzled Harry. "How did you do? Because I, I passed." Neville handed Harry his results.

Harry recognized the quaver now; it was disbelief. Harry found himself suddenly impatient to know his results. He pulled out his own results and ripped open the envelope.

Ministry of Magic Great Britain

Government Qualification Test Bureau

Test results for : Harry James Potter Test: Government

90% Pass

Students are reminded that a grade of 90% or better is required to pass, the test may be retaken for a six galleon fee as many times as

is required. Once the Government test has been passed, students may undertake the Law tests 1-7.

Harry looked at Neville then down at Neville's results. Neville had gotten a ninety seven. "Congratulations."

"I can't believe it. I scored higher than you."

"I'm amazed I passed at all given how tired I was this summer."

"I owe it to you, you know."

"Rubbish, it wasn't me writing your test answers. Besides, you scored higher than I did."

"No, but you taught me how best to study and have believed in me until I could believe in myself. Maybe you should become a teacher, you'd be great at it. Think, you could spare some poor child from having a teacher like Binns, or Quirrell, or Lockhart."

Harry shuddered. "Possibly."

"First Hogsmeade weekend, let's celebrate! I'm buying!"

"Sounds good, Nev, but it's time for class; the celebration will have to wait."

By the end of the day Harry added Hagrid to the list of incredibly bad teachers Hogwarts had. It wasn't that the man didn't know his subject; it was he had no sense of appropriate level when it came to what he was teaching. Harry had cast a petrificus totalis on the hippogriff Hagrid had been showing the class before it could attack Malfoy for failing to absorb the part of Hagrid's lecture that said insulting the beast was dangerous. He had been given a week's detention for it. He was ready to kill his roommate, and it was only the first class. He vaguely wondered if it would do any good to protest through his Head of House. He liked his other electives. Arithmancy was easy thanks to the fact he was very good at math, and runes were simply fascinating. McGonagall had even mellowed. Durrand, while no Lupin, at least wasn't as bad as Quirrell or Lockhart so all in all the school year was shaping up to be a good one.

After classes were over Harry went to the library and finally dealt with his mail. Starting with the letter from Healer O'Shaunessy.

Dear Lord Potter,

I am writing to you only because I heard what you did with your Godfather's most recent letter to you. I realize neither he nor I have the right to ask this of you, but I beg you to consider meeting with him again. You hired me to help your godfather recover from dementor exposure. I realize and empathize with you that he has said unfortunate and immature things to you early in the course of his treatment. However, he has made significant improvement since that time, and I feel that he has progressed as far he can until he has the opportunity to apologize to you. To prevent further dispute I would come and supervise the meeting and promise to end the meeting when and if he regresses.

Finally, Lord Potter, I want to thank you for this opportunity, his case gave me an unparalleled opportunity for my research.

Sincerely, Paige O'Shaunessy

Harry frowned. The last thing he wanted was to give his godfather the chance to hurt him yet again. He had quite enough emotional pain in his life already. He put the letter to the side. He would decide later what to do. Harry moved on to his next letter the one from Nicholas Flamel.

Dear Harry,

It sounds as if you had an extremely busy summer preparing yourself to enter the world of magical politics, my deepest sympathies. Politics are a curse especially when you reach my age. Each generation thinks that they are the only one to have faced trouble, trust me they're not. Even the troubles vary only in specific name. Inevitably a lack of sense brings about the repetition of history, I frequently wish people could learn the lessons history teaches. Because if we don't learn it, life has a way of putting the lesson in front of us as many times as is required to learn it and then people wonder why history seems to repeat itself. I tried to teach this to Albus but it was a lesson he failed. Hopefully you're a better student.

A new cousin as well, well family is either the Creator's greatest blessing or an absolute curse, and sometimes they are both at once.

Congratulations on passing your belt test. A black belt is quite an achievement. Well done!

I also highly approve of the electives you have chosen. They are very useful, and tie into many fields including alchemy. I found your questions about the beginning alchemy book to be insightful. Alchemy is as much muggle chemistry and physics as it is magic. I would strongly urge you to do the experiments on pages 115, 150 and 198. Those experiments done with a scientist's perspective should give you the answers you seek. I also approve that you have continued to follow along with your IGCSE studies. The isolationist policy of the magical world has definitely made it lag. I agree that it has more the flavor of the 1940's than that of the 1990's. That was one reason Perenelle and I left the magical world when the statute of secrecy was imposed. We had money enough that hiding in plain sight wasn't an issue for us. Neither of us is particularly dependent on magic to get by. Our son was born without magic. Sadly that meant that the elixir wouldn't work for him, and his descendants died in the Reign of Terror.

It hurt to lose all our descendants like that. Like I said family can be both a blessing and a curse. We avoided France for roughly a century after that. India and Indochina of that era were very intriguing. We came back to Paris at the invite of the Curies. It was astonishing how much Paris had changed.

Perenelle and I had a relaxing summer going from tennis tournament to tournament. She is quite fond of the sport even after all these centuries. Although she does at times miss the original incarnation of the sport that was played indoors, she has come to appreciate lawn tennis. She compared Andre Agassi with a very young Henry the Eighth, I don't see the similarity myself, but her memory for these things is much sharper than my own. Do you play tennis?

I have searched for a book containing the legend mentioned in the study on snow phoenixes. I have yet to find one. Perenelle has a great memory for stories. I think she knows this one, so perhaps I'll persuade her to sit and write it down for you.

Do let me know the outcome of your test and tell me about your teachers. Take care.

Your friend, N.F.

Harry grinned. Trust Nicholas to make him smile. Harry pulled out a piece of parchment.

Dear Nicholas,

Thanks for your letter. I passed my Government test, barely. I think I may ask my trustees to let me have an easier summer next year, I didn't get nearly enough time behind my easel this year.

As for school most of my classes are what I expect. History, how anyone can learn it from a monotone, one topic ghost is completely beyond my comprehension, and I sort of like history. Perenelle's observation of Henry the eighth for example was very interesting and amusing. I mean why can't they get ghosts of different eras to come in and teach history from a first person point of view, or they get someone with a little life in them to liven up the subject. Pun intended. Transfiguration is a little better this year, McGonagall isn't as bad for some reason. Flitwick is pretty much the same as always. Sprout has actually ceased watching me from the corner of her eye. Snape, while still an uptight prick, actually has ceased his perpetual fault-finding with me. Durrand is something of a bore but at least he's not a complete incompetent like Lockhart. I'll probably still learn more from Dan and Will. Sinestra is as boring and behind the times as ever(and always). I swear the woman could at least have read the American Navigator it teaches all the equations needed to figure placement on Earth via the stars if you know where one is the rest are easy to find. (Of course it also works in vice versa, if you know where on the earth you are you can find any celestial body.) I have yet to learn anything from the woman. Vector is amazing, knows her subject backwards and forwards. Of course something tells me that she is so wrapped up in equations that real life is passing her by. Babbling is hysterical, absolutely rock solid on her subject and she has this clever way of inserting little puns and witty, cynical comments into her lectures that on the surface are easily missed (especially by those lacking in the brain or humor department) but to anyone else-hysterical. Sadly I think most of it goes straight over the heads of my peers. For such a dry subject she keeps it plenty lively; I think she's my favorite all-time teacher or maybe second thinking of

Sensei. And then of course comes Hagrid. I 'm dreading his classes. Don't get me wrong, Hagrid is an okay bloke, and he knows his creatures, but his perception of appropriate material is the stuff of nightmares. In his first class does he bring out bowtruckles or unicorns? No, he had to be different and bring out hippogriffs. I had to freeze one with a petrificus totalis before it could maul my roommate. Not that he wouldn't have deserved it, he was insulting the beast, but Malfoy is the vindictive sort. I suspect if the beast had hurt him he would have seen the hapless creature dead. I got a week's detention for saving the beast, go figure.

I swear there are times I almost regret demanding the Hat sort me into Slytherin -mostly when experiencing undue prejudice from those of other houses-. but most of the time I'm okay with that decision. I have fewer expectations to deal with from people, even if I have to deal with more sideways looks from them.

As to your question, no, I have never played tennis. Swimming, yes, track, yes, football and cricket, also yes. But those sports plus kenpo, kendo and a small amount of basketball and gymnastics is the summary of my sports experience.

As to my IGCSEs I currently plan to take them summer after next. I am confident about the citizenship, English language, history, math, sciences, and physical education portions portions, but am less certain of the literature English test, the Latin, modern French, religious studies, art and I think I'll probably use home economics for my technology requirement. Combining this with my magical studies and I honestly feel as if I'm spending all my time studying. At least when it comes to my IGCSE coursework I'm not completely swamped by writing papers for most of it. I make sure I understand the material and move on; that is one advantage of self-study. The softer subjects- I.e. the ones I worry about- I really need interaction with someone or many people who know the subjects to establish that I'm truly getting the subject. Not to mention it is very hard to learn a foreign language if you never have the opportunity to speak it or hear it spoken. My current level of spoken French is barely beyond toddler and I'm uncertain how I'll be able to improve.

Thank you for the advice on the experiments, I'll have to find the time to do that. I have a paper to write for Charms not to mention all my other schoolwork so I'll end this for now. Take care. Sincerely, Harry Potter

Harry set to work on his Charms paper, doing a first draft to test his memory of the basic theory. He would revise it later including additional sources and information. After he did it, he pulled out his letter from Remus Lupin.

Dear Harry,

As you can doubtlessly tell Hogwarts didn't renew my contract. I hope that whoever replaced me knows their stuff, if not you can always owl me questions, I promise not to drop completely out of sight the way I did after your parents' death again.

I've made a lot of mistakes over the years, deserting you was one of them. I thought if I shut myself away, closed off my feelings and tried not to care about anyone that I would be okay. It hurt so badly to lose everyone, to feel as if my dreams of love and acceptance were destroyed in the course of a single night. I succeeded in shutting myself away, but what I didn't realize until I saw you at Hogwarts was that I wasn't just shutting away pain. I was shutting away love and joy as well. I missed out on the love and joy I could have had by maintaining contact with you, and that didn't just hurt me it hurt you too. I'm very sorry, cub. I hope you can forgive me.

Here is where I am probably going to offend you so I'll apologize in advance. Harry, you have put barriers up to protect yourself, much as I did when I was young. It is not meant as a criticism, merely an observation. I'm positive you have good reason for having them, but I would encourage you not to close them completely. Yes, you miss out on pain, but humans were never meant to be alone. People who try to become an island are frequently bitter and they miss out on the sweetness and joy that make up for all the bad stuff that happens to us in life.

I have to thank you for everything you've done with getting your godfather cleared and taking care of him this past year. You gave me back one of my brothers. The joy having him back has brought me is priceless. I wish for you to experience that joy for yourself, and I ask for one more thing, I ask that you forgive Sirius. Meet with him, he has come to see that he was wrong and he wants your forgiveness. If things go badly I swear that I will never ask it of you again, but please, cub, will you try to meet him halfway?

Take care cub, I love you. Remus

Harry looked at the letter in disbelief for a moment. How dare he? He resisted the urge to crush the letter for half a minute but in the end he gave in and crumpled it into a ball. He gathered his belongings and stuffed them into his bag. Neville, who was across the table, raised an eyebrow in question but Harry ignored him. "I've got quidditch practice. I'll see you later." Harry didn't feel badly for voicing the half-truth. He had practice but it was a half an hour away. On his way past the trash he tossed the parchment ball in. He didn't see Neville fish it out the moment he was out of sight.

Neville took it back to the table he and Harry had been working at, spread it out, read it and winced.

He was oblivious to the slender blonde girl who read it over his shoulder until her soft voice said, "Ouch, no wonder Harry wanted to go fly."

Neville jumped, hitting his funny bone on the table in the process. "Luna! Are you trying to kill me! It's bad enough that I'm reading this. Harry's very private . If he knew you'd read it..."

"Harry isn't in a good place. He hasn't been for a long time, this summer was very difficult for him. But those of us who count him as a friend need to be there for him. Professor Lupin's heart is in the right place and he cares about Harry. But this is too much, too soon and sadly, although the Professor was speaking of himself, it's too uncannily close to what he is feeling for Harry to handle right now.

"Oh and Neville, don't worry I won't tell a soul, on my honor as a witch."

Neville wasn't sure why, but all his instincts told him to trust her, so he nodded.

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Marcus Flint recognized the intensity Harry brought to the practice that day. Harry was always a focused player but if he was dealing with emotional turmoil it was as if someone had kicked him into a higher more intense level. As he watched the practice, he got more excited. He would need to find two reserve players, one for chaser

and one for beater for since several Slytherins were graduating this year That way next year they would likely have a starting lineup already ready. Montague was slated to be the next captain, so he would take this year to teach him. The team was pretty tight and this was only the first practice. As the practice came to an end Marcus dismissed most the team and flew up to where Harry had just caught the practice snitch for the sixth time in an hour and a half. "So who needs to disappear into the passageways to never be seen again?"

Harry shot him an extremely puzzled look.

"Well, someone obviously upset you, you've doubled your catch rate this practice. The last time you were this upset, you were ready to macerate your Godfather."

"That obvious, huh?"

"Harry, you're being as obvious as a Gryffindor to those of us that know you."

"Great."

"Harry, maybe the rest of the school looks at you and sees a snake but to those of us in the dorm it's a huge question how you got in as a snake to begin with. Because despite your high standing in your class and the level of cunning you display, you never talk about your long term goals and you're far too tolerant. It's like you have a moral code you go by that sets you apart, something that for most of us snakes tends to be rather fast and loose. You put up with things that most of us snakes would get, pardon the pun, hissy about far longer than any of us would, and your revenge seldom as vengeful as the average snake's. Not that your revenge isn't effective, actually it is scarily effective, but it isn't the normal sort of thing most of us snakes choose to do. What makes the other snakes and everyone else afraid of you is that while you are content to get even and go no further you tend to go for the personal vulnerabilities rather than just obvious humiliation."

Harry thought about it and quickly came to the conclusion that Marcus was right. Harry figured Marcus already knew a fair number of his secrets. The truth about this one probably wouldn't hurt.

Marcus could see Harry thinking it over. Knowing the other boy as he did he drew his wand. "On my honor and on my magic, the content of this discussion will go no further."

"Remember last year, I told you I told the hat to put me in Slytherin?"

It took Marcus a moment, but he remember last year's broom discussion. "Yes, you said you did it to hinder the Headmaster's plans. My question is where did it want to put you? As I recall yours is the longest sort I can remember."

"It considered all the houses but it favored Gryffindor the most. I threatened to shred it to make it sort me snake."

"You chose a hard road."

"Somehow I doubt it is a much harder road than the one the Headmaster would have me on; at least this way I get to make some of my own choices."

"Yeah, I suppose. So, what put you in such a hissy fit, if it wasn't a person here at school?"

Harry practically snarled, "I don't want to talk about it."

Marcus was mildly surprised when in addition to hearing Harry snarl he felt a mild pulse of Harry's magical aura. He wondered if Harry had recognized what he'd done. "Okay ,if you change your mind, I'm available. Practice is over we should head in. Dinner is in twenty minutes."

"Marcus..."

"Yes?"

"Thanks for giving a shit."

"You're welcome." Marcus flew down. He felt a certain smugness, He was old enough to recognize the onset of an angsty puberty and a Harry in turmoil while playing quidditch was a sight to behold. He had been mildly concerned- coming into this year - about the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff teams, but if today was anything to go by, Slytherin would dominate the pitch. His only concern now was if the

lions found a good seeker this year. Madame Hooch had promised to get a couple of quidditch scouts to games this year. He and Oliver Wood were both hopeful that they would be noticed.

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As Harry entered the Great Hall he bumped into Daphne and Hermione having a conversation in French.

"Wait a minute, do the two of you speak French?" He asked.

"Oui, je parle francaise." Daphne answered.

While Hermione answered, "Yes."

"What would it take for me to get you two to teach me?"

"Sorry, Harry. I'm taking too heavy a course load this year." Hermione answered.

Daphne asked, "Why?"

"Because I want to learn it. I've actually studied it some already, and I know about conjugation and structure. I can write and read it if I have a dictionary handy, but to be fluent I need to practice listening and speaking it."

"Okay, I'll help."

"Brilliant. Let's set up a time."

"Okay, but I want you to help me in defense and transfiguration in return."

Harry struggled to contain a wince; defense wouldn't be bad, but Daphne struggled with transfiguration. Harry figured it was because Daphne was a kinesthetic and auditory learner and transfiguration was ninety percent visual. But then again, helping her would mean lots of time with her... he inwardly groaned as his body reacted to that thought. Blushing slightly he said "Okay."

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Harry did visit Professor Snape after dinner to check with him about the detentions.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Potter, as much as I agree the detention is not warranted, Hagrid is now a professor and to cancel his assigned detentions would undermine my own position."

"I figured as much. Thanks anyway, Professor." Harry thought that was the end of it, until during his detention Professor Snape showed up while he was cleaning a chicken coop and gave Hagrid what for.

"Hagrid, what is this I heard: you endangered students in their very first class!"

"What? I wouldn' -"

"I understand Potter here is serving a detention for casting a petrificus totalis on a hippogriff."

"That's righ' He cast it and it coulda hurt Beaky."

"Did you ask him why he did it?"

"Wha'?"

"Did you ask him why?"

"No."

"Potter, annoying though he can be, never does anything without a reason. Perhaps you should ask him."

After a half a minute where Hagrid opened and closed his mouth several times trying to think of a protest, he finally got a resigned expression on his face and shouted. "Potter!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Why did yeh cast a spell on Buckbeak?"

"He was about to attack Mr. Malfoy, sir."

"Beaky wouldn' hurt someone!"

"Malfoy insulted him, sir. I think he was talking when you warned us about that. I figured it was better to petrify the hippogriff than for him to attack the son of one of the governors. After all, with Mr. Malfoy's connections, he probably would have had the animal destroyed."

Hagrid turned red and said, "Thank yeh, Mr. Potter, you're through. And I think yeh don't have to come for the others."

"Professors."

As he was leaving he heard, "And now, Hagrid, I believe we need to discuss the content of your class."

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As Halloween approached Harry settled into his demanding study schedule that was lightly punctuated by quidditch, his bi-weekly chess games, and the odd half an hour spent sketching. Hagrid's class improved after Professor Snape's visit although Harry still found the book the Monster Book of Monsters more annoying than informative. He left it tied in his trunk and used alternate sources in the library.

The cadre had been slightly surprised when two weeks into school Luna Lovegood had trailed in after Michael Corner for their morning workout. The girls weren't exactly welcoming to the younger Ravenclaw, her reputation of being out there making them withdraw slightly. Neville, Michael, and Ernie interacted mostly normally with her. Blaise was perpetually smirking, while Aaron shook his head. Harry just did his best to ignore her and treat her the same as everyone else but it was difficult. His magic was very aware of her, just as his body was very aware of Daphne's curvaceous form. Between the two girls Harry frequently indulged in cathartic screaming in his bed behind silenced curtains before even attempting occlumency exercises and sleep each night.

Harry and Daphne's study session were both wonderful and embarrassing. Harry was learning French and Daphne was getting better grades in defense and transfiguration, but Harry found himself distracted at odd moments by Daphne's smile or by watching her run her hands over the objects he had found to help her with transfiguration. He had figured out the reason for the encompassing

student robes, they did a good job of hiding the attributes of the students' bodies so it was easier to pay attention in class. But since Harry had seen Daphne in workout clothes, his imagination all too readily supplied him images when he looked at her. Harry was embarrassed because he would be talking normally to her one minute and the next he would get an erection or his voice would crack. When his voice cracked she always smiled and reassured him, but Harry felt self-conscious because none of the other boys in their year had voices that were cracking yet and he had only started his teen growth spurt.

Although Christmas was months away Harry had decided to give each of his friends in the cadre a group portrait in chalks for Christmas but that meant he had to get individual sketches that he would meld into the whole. Most of the group was easy but Hermione was difficult. Harry finally settled for sketching her while she worked in the library. He really wondered about her, she was somehow taking all the electives offered. And he couldn't figure out how that was possible since both divination and arithmancy coincided and ancient runes and muggle studies coincided. Thankfully, though, it wasn't his problem.

Harry had reluctantly agreed to meet with his Godfather over the Christmas break, putting it off until then by citing the desire not to be distracted from his studies. But first he had to get through autumn term and what he hoped would be his first date with Daphne. The first Hogsmeade weekend had been announced and he was finally allowed to go.

Chapter 42 Relating about Relationships

The cadre had planned that the first Hogsmeade weekend they would have lunch together at The Three Broomsticks to celebrate Neville and Harry's success, but Harry planned to ask Daphne to be his date. He planned to take her to Honeydukes and give her some chocolates as a gift afterwards. He was nervous but he knew that even if Daphne said no she wasn't the only girl in school and they would still be friends. He wanted to take her because he found her attractive and unlike many girls who looked at him she at least could hold a sensible conversation.

He put off asking her until two days before.

"Hey, Daphne can I walk you to Hogsmeade this weekend?"

"Sure, Harry."

"Cool."

That weekend however the cadre wound up all walking together. At The Three Broomsticks they went to the room Neville's Gran had booked for the celebration where they had a sumptuous lunch of roast duck, wild rice with mushrooms, broccoli, carrot parsnip puree, spinach salad w/ dried cherries, glazed pecans and blue cheese with balsamic vinaigrette dressing, and rolls with pecan tart a la mode for dessert all washed down with butterbeer.

Lady Augusta was there to celebrate with Neville and to chaperone since the cadre had so many young ladies. Harry inwardly snickered since they were never supervised in the mornings and usually they were dressed much more revealingly than they were in their school robes. But he allowed her to keep her illusions as did the rest of the cadre. When the dessert course was served she stood.

"I want to thank all of you for coming, and celebrating Neville's achievement of passing his government test on the first try. I'm even prouder of the fact that he set a new standard when he did it by achieving the highest score that has ever been scored by a first time test taker. To Neville!" she lifted her glass of elfwine.

"To Neville!" The group raised their butterbeer glasses.

Neville, blushing a brilliant scarlet, stood.

"Thank you. I accept your adulation." The group laughed heartily as he had intended. "I want to acknowledge someone else who was critical in my achieving this. Harry, without your drive I wouldn't have been inspired to take the test, without your teaching I wouldn't have had the skills to learn it all, and without your friendship I wouldn't even have the confidence to try let alone succeed; so thank you. Also I wonder how many people at the ministry were astounded when two first time test takers passed. To Harry!"

Lady Augusta wore a surprised expression as the cadre raised their glasses to Harry. She hadn't realized he too had passed.

Harry stood. "Thank you, Nev. I'm glad that you allowed me to experience the fondest dreams of most teachers, to have the student surpass the teacher. While I passed, I did not set a new standard which is what we really came here to celebrate. To Neville," he paused while the group again raised their glasses to Neville, then continued, "and I have one more toast. To Lady Augusta, who went against the standard of waiting until sixteen and believed in both of us enough to put us in the class, and who has supplied us with this really excellent party."

The group laughed then raised their glasses "To Lady Augusta!"

After that party evolved into various conversations. Neville introduced his Gran to everyone. Conversations included Hermione quizzing both Harry and Neville about the class then shifting her attention to Lady Augusta.

Lady Augusta was slightly appalled by Hermione Granger's intense manner and refusal to be sidetracked into social niceties but when she noticed Neville and Harry's exasperated eye-rolls she figured that this was standard behavior for this girl. She decided to see if the chit could take a hint. She gave a disparaging sniff. All that happened, was Harry started to smirk and Neville blushed on his friend's behalf. Augusta sighed. She really needed to convince Minerva that etiquette lessons should be required for the Gryffindor students.

Harry decided that if he didn't want to give in to his desire to laugh at Lady Augusta's annoyance with Hermione, he needed to leave.

"Thank you again for the party Lady Augusta. Unfortunately I have a few errands I need to run and time waits for no one. If you will excuse me, I need to collect Daphne..."

"I will forgive you your absence." She knew from the gleam in his eye he was leaving rather than continue to control himself regarding the Granger girl.

Harry went over to Daphne. "Daphne, are you ready to go run your errands?"

"Of course, just let me collect Tracey." She stepped away before Harry could protest.

Harry blinked, disappointed that he apparently hadn't made himself clear that he had asked Daphne for a date.

Daphne reappeared with Tracey in tow. "We need to make our goodbyes to Lady Augusta." Harry nodded and led them over to Lady Augusta, Neville, and Hermione.

"Lady Augusta, Tracey and I want to thank you so much for including us at this special celebration." Daphne said.

"It was my pleasure Miss Greengrass, Miss Davis. Am I to assume you're leaving?"

"Yes, Ma'am, and may we say it has been an honor and a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

Tracey stated.

"It has been a pleasure for me as well. Harry, are you escorting these young ladies?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, goodbye then, I suppose I shall see you at the Yule?"

"Likely, Lady Augusta, quite likely." Harry was mildly amused to realize the cadre, except Hermione, had taken his planned exodus as their cue to leave and had lined up behind him to make their thank yous and goodbyes.

Lady Augusta was relatively pleased by Neville's choice of friends, with the exception of Miss Granger. After the girl finally departed an hour after the rest of the group, she eyed her grandson. "I find it interesting that most of your friends are from other houses. Shall I ask Rosmerta for some tea?"

"Please. I can't claim the credit for the mix though. They came initially to be friends with Harry."

"Does that bother you?"

"Not really. Harry...he's attractive, powerful, and carries himself with purpose. He's intelligent and charismatic. People are drawn to him. He's also emotionally remote, cynical, and at times manipulative. He knows how to tell whom he can trust from those he can't."

"He trusts these others, therefore you do?" Augusta arched an eyebrow as she asked the question.

"Harry trusts them as far as it is possible for him to trust, mostly... I don't think I like Harry's aunt much."

"Tell me what you think about these friends of yours and about Harry's aunt."

"Harry is always a bit emotionally remote. He is very brave and loyal to those he calls friends. I'm kinda surprised he wasn't sorted Gryffindor. I think his relationship to his family is why. To them he's a means to an end. He's afraid of being rejected so he holds himself apart. I accepted him on the train that first year, despite his sorting I remained his friend and in return he is pretty completely loyal to me. And I to him."

"Hermione thinks of us as her friends and we do care about her, but as you may have noticed she's pretty backwards socially. Harry says it's from too little interaction with her peers when she was little and the the fact she is just so incredibly book smart. I suspect if Hermione took the class Harry and I took, she would probably ace the test since it tests straight knowledge. Hermione's weaknesses are: that she has trouble spotting faults in those in authority, she has a faith in books that doesn't quit, she tends to obsess over things she gets curious about, she believes she's always right, she almost

always has an opinion that she's willing to fight for, and she tends to forget that muggle ways aren't magical ways. Harry says and I concur that most of her weaknesses stem from her greatest strength. She is without a doubt the smartest person any of us is likely to meet and her fabulous memory has made it so that while lots of people have let her down, books haven't. So she trusts them more. She's so smart, she's made few mistakes and she's forgotten she can be wrong. Harry drives her crazy by ignoring her much of the time."

"Blaise, Daphne, and Tracey are true Slytherins: political, self-interest driven. That's not to say they aren't intelligent or nice, they just always have an aspect of what's in it for them. They see how Harry has, or rather will have power in the future. They want to be connected to it. They also want to distance themselves from the Dark Slytherins like Nott, Crabbe, Goyle, Parkinson, Bulstrode and Malfoy. Not that Malfoy will ever have lots of power after the way Harry has managed him, but he has the wealth to eventually be powerful. I just doubt he'll get as powerful as his father. They also enjoy the fact that by studying as a group we maximize our learning potential. Half of us are in the top ten of our year.

"Aaron is Slytherin as well. But unlike the others, he is loyal to Harry. He's from the branch of the Yaxleys that didn't follow He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named in the last war. He has brittle bones, first year Harry rescued him from a beating by the MacLaggens. Then last year Cassandra found everything the muggles know about brittle bones which included information on how to make bones get stronger. Apparently it has helped Aaron's family."

"Muggles know that?" Augusta gasped.

"Gran, I know you don't hate muggles but the fact is the magical world is no longer as supreme as it was when you were a girl. If it every really was. Maybe we used to be but I've listened to Harry and Hermione talk about some of the things muggles can do now. Did you know that muggles have gone into space and have actually visited the moon? They have aeroplanes that can fly faster than the speed of sound. They still haven't got anything that beats pepper up for the common cold but they can fix all kinds of injuries and illnesses. Harry and Hermione use knowledge they gained in the muggle world to surpass many of the students in Hogwarts."

"Anyway Aaron is loyal to Harry. He's also why I'm doing as well in Potions as I am. Snape is rubbish as a teacher. Aaron takes us through the potions before we have to make them in class. He teaches us the things we need to watch out for, and makes sure we know the procedures. As result Harry and I usually turn in what Snape calls adequate potions. Hermione gets them on her own. Draco Malfoy is about the only one who garners a good from the Professor.

"Michael and Susan became friends after the Yule ball first year .They weren't solidly with us until Harry started us working on the basilisk problem last year. Michael now respects Harry's intelligence. They've learned how if you're Harry's friend he looks out for you, and that despite his sorting, he's a decent person.

"Harry does look after us. We always have someone to help with homework. Either Harry himself or one of the friends we've made through him. He's teaching all of us how to be fit and how to defend ourselves. Quirrell first year was an awful teacher. Harry found out what was on the ministry exams at the end of the year from some third years in his dorm whose dads are aurors. He made sure we knew everything we were expected to know by finals. He's done that each year. Not even Hermione outscored him in defense. He outscores her in Astronomy too, drives her nuts.

"Hannah is part of the cadre because Susan is. She tends to be the little mother of the group. She usually guides the History studies. Her grandfather taught her to love it and she's way better than Binns. She helps us understand not just the what, when and by whom something happened, but also the how and the why. I sometimes wish Hermione listened to Hannah half as much as Hannah listens to her.

"Padma has rarely joined us this year, her twin is in Gryffindor and is very anti-Slytherin. Pavarti is less than fond of the egalitarian nature of our group. She even harasses me and Hermione in the common room. Padma got in trouble with their parents over the summer for it. Apparently her parents were less than happy with her placement in Ravenclaw, they're diehard Gryffindors.

"Ernie joined us initially to look after Susan and Hannah. Since he realized what we're about, and that Harry is a good person; he's become part of the group. Harry describes him as solid not flashy.

He and Hannah are the ones of us that score the lowest of our group and they're still in the top half of the class.

"Luna Lovegood just became part of the group this year. She's different, I'm not sure where and how she fits into the group yet, but she seems to understand Harry the way I do if not even better. Harry protects her. I get the feeling even he doesn't understand why. I think she might be a seer of some kind. She seems a little out there, most students ostracize her a bit, but she's smart, second in her year last year."

"She's like her mother then." Augusta carefully considered her grandson's words. Hindsight told her she was very lucky Harry had stepped into Neville's life. Her habit of criticism and her lack of faith in him - not to mention that of her sister and Algie - had nearly ruined Neville.

Harry could be a very winning young man. Given he was the Boy-Who-Lived who despite his upbringing had managed to cut the strings from Dumbledore with only a small amount of help, it argued he would be a formidable force in the magical world potentially even greater than what Neville would get from being the highest ranked Lord in the wizarding world.. The group of friends they had assembled and the loyalty Harry had garnered from those friends was also impressive. The Corner boy would cement ties to his trustees. Susan Bones gave a strong tie to the DMLE. The Yaxley boy likely had the makings of a potion master or healer. Having someone you trusted to serve in such a position was priceless. She didn't really care about the Abbott girl, except that she was a half-blood and more acceptable in terms of her manners than the Granger chit with both of them having the potential to be brides for Neville. The MacMillian boy was a sound political choice; the clan was large and had ties to most all the lighter moderate magical families. In that sense the Slytherins were good choices too. They were from families that had ties too the moderates as well. That Neville was also part of the group and from what she could tell he knew each of the members boded very well for her once shy and retiring grandson.

She didn't always like Harry. He was, when angry, a very brash young man, and between his proud bearing and his intelligence he frequently came across as arrogant. But was it arrogance or competence? Most people just couldn't tell the difference, and she

was wondering if she could after finding out he'd passed. Originally she had agreed with Tiberius that failing the government test would knock him down a peg or two but despite working under the handicap of little sleep and dividing his attention with land management lessons with Felicia Corner, Harry had passed.

She wondered how many other little such surprises he would hand his trustees. She had initially been against his hiring young Miss Yaxley, but the previous few months had proven his decision to be an astute one. Some of the information that girl had assembled and forwarded to the trustees had allowed Tiberius and herself to apply pressure in certain quarters to some of the most obstructive families and departments of the ministry which in turn enabled them to increase Amelia Bones' budget slightly instead of the cuts Fudge had been lobbying for at the behest of Malfoy.

"Gran?"

Augusta startled. "Sorry, Neville, I lost myself in thought for a moment. Do you wish to continue your lordship training with Harry?"

"Yes, although he expressed a wish to go at a slower pace next summer, so he would have at least some time to paint, and I would like at least a bit of time in the greenhouses."

"I'll see about arranging it that way then. Neville I am very proud of you and I know your parents would be as well."

Neville blushed a deep red, then he reached out and wrapped her in a hug. "I love you, Gran."

Augusta had never been a particularly demonstrative person and the hug took her by surprise. Wanting to distract Neville and herself she said, "Now. what is this about Harry's aunt? She seemed like a perfectly acceptable sort to me."

"I can't describe it. Harry said some things about being a means to an end for them. He doesn't have a normal viewpoint for someone our age. He's so ...cynical and ...calculating. He usually knows what to say to someone to get them to do what he wants."

"He's manipulative?"

"Sort of. He's aware when he does it and he prefers not to use it, but if he sees a benefit, especially for the other person, he'll do it. Not ever for anything bad, he's really strict about that. He does it almost as if it's a habit and he always seems to ...dislike himself afterwards."

"Has he used this ability on you?"

"A few times back in first year, usually when I was feeling reluctant to workout or study. Like I said he tends only to use it to benefit others. Another thing is that he has a highly developed sense of getting even. Back in first year he got tired of the way everyone looked at him sideways. At the end of the year he pranked everyone. He made them look at themselves sideways."

"Is that what that word on your forehead at the end of the year was about?"

"Yes."

"And he did this to the whole school?"

"Yes."

"Including the teachers?"

Neville nodded. Before saying "Not that anyone knows for sure that it was him outside of me, Aaron, Harry and Cassandra. We know because we helped. They suspect, but they don't know. You won't tell, will you?"

Augusta considered, as revenges went that was very appropriate. "No, Neville, I won't tell. You think that Harry's abilities and attitudes are because of his aunt?"

"I'm sure of it. I mean think about it, Harry only goes home during the summer. He told me first year that his aunt expected a lot. Christmas morning he laughed about it, but he told me about muggle stories of Father Christmas bringing bad children coal for their stockings. His uncle had given him charcoal and paper; he said it was as close to a comment as his uncle could make. He pushes really hard at school. He always has, but ... it seems like this year he's doing it from force of habit rather than because he wants it. If

that makes any sense? He spends Christmas with us or with his elves. What does that say about his relationship with his family? And on the Express he told me ..." Neville stopped himself. "No, I can't tell you that. It would be breaching Harry's trust and privacy. It suffices to say, I think Harry is depressed and his aunt is a large part of why."

"So what do you want me to do, Neville? His aunt has legal custody."

"I don't know. I guess I want you to be aware, to not judge him too harshly. If things get worse, I want us to help him if we can."

Augusta did see far more than Neville realized. She would have to have a meeting with the other members of Harry's trustee board.

Three weeks later Lady Augusta was hosting a tea for the trustees.

Tiberius was the first to venture beyond the social niceties. "So, Augusta, why bring us together like this?"

"I," Augusta paused. The six of them shared a responsibility to prepare Harry for his position in the magical world and over the last year and three quarters they hadn't gotten to know each other much beyond a superficial level. "It concerns Harry. Neville has expressed some concern, and as Harry's trustees I think it behooves us to investigate."

"Concerns?" Felicia Corner asked. She was fond of Harry and like Neville she had noticed as he seemed to get more stretched and stressed as the summer had gone by.

Augusta flushed uncomfortably. "Yes, that Harry's home life might not be all it should be."

The rest of them joined Lady Augusta in her discomfort. All of them could think of times when they had noticed the odd interaction between Harry and his aunt, but none of them had even thought to question it, or Harry's odd maturity.

Felicia, who had interacted with Petunia and Harry the most, thought carefully. She could see why there was cause for concern. She had been feeling it herself. But at the same time, she also was familiar

enough with both wizarding and muggle laws regarding children to know that any move to remove Harry from Petunia's care wouldn't happen because there weren't sufficient grounds for it. "Lady Longbottom, I understand what you are trying to express to us. I share your concern, however, I had already noticed the inconsistencies and made a point of making some observations. Harry is ...He does not...Harry's aunt does not care for him the way any parent or grandparent would wish for a surviving child to be cared about after the death of themselves, and in this sense yes, there is some cause for concern. But Harry is healthy, he is being educated to his station, and he shows no sign of physical deprivation. In the eyes of the government this means he is receiving adequate care and changes to his custody are very unlikely. Even if his mental and emotional state isn't all of what we would wish, it is not so far off that they will intervene."

"I see. But what can we do? Doing nothing isn't acceptable to me. Neville is concerned and Alice, whose duty it was, is incapacitated." Augusta said.

"I'm afraid there isn't much we can do, except try to make up for the lack between us." Felicia sighed.

Stephen Corner couldn't believe he hadn't really noticed before Lady Augusta said something. He had been around Harry and his aunt longer than anyone except Felicia, and Lady Augusta was the one who had been around Harry the most.

Tiberius -in an effort to move on- said, " So, Augusta, since you seem to know more about Harry than the rest of us, did you hear about what his results were?"

"He passed, as did Neville. I think Harry is something of a born teacher. Neville had the highest score a first time test taker has ever gotten. Neville attributes his success to Harry's tutoring."

"Guess that plan to knock some of the wind out of him didn't work did it? But if what you and Felicia are indicating of his home life is true then we're going to have to come up with another plan." Tiberius chewed briefly on his mustache. "I like the lad but he is more than a little intimidating for the average witch or wizard, and it isn't healthy for someone that age to get the public adulation that he gets. It goes to their heads."

"I agree with you, Uncle, but we need to understand where the boy is truly at emotionally. He's already a very guarded individual and if we damage him further it could be a very bad thing for everyone." Horace said.

Perseus spoke, "Perhaps we should demonstrate to him that we do care about him beyond just caring about the business he brings us. He has given us with social presents the last two years at Yuletide, and last yuletide we gave him with the classes that fulfilled our duty towards him. Perhaps we should make an effort to give him items of a deeper meaning. Do any of you know what his interests are? Or what classes he is taking at Hogwarts this year?

"I think we also should talk with Petunia. See if we can remedy the situation there." Felicia said. She also had the idea of speaking to Cassandra since she was privy to much of Harry and Petunia's interaction.

The others nodded.

"Can we leave that to you, love?" Stephen asked.

Felicia nodded.

A week later Felicia met with Cassandra in one of the Leaky Cauldron's private rooms. Felicia raised a privacy barrier as a matter of habit.

"Cassandra, thank you for coming. How are you?"

"I'm good, Mrs. Corner."

"That's good. So what is it that Harry has you doing for him these days?"

"He mostly has me doing some research into the Slytherin family magics and the spell that gave him with the ability to talk to snakes. But I usually spend two to three hours a weeks on fan mail, another two dealing with managing the houses, and five or so helping Mrs. Dursley."

"That's right I'd forgotten about the spell research. How is that going?" Felicia asked.

"Very poorly. The libraries I have access to don't have the right kind of books. I put in a request to Dumbledore to let me have access to the Chamber of Secrets books but so far he's ignored me.

"Has he? Did Harry ever voice a plan regarding those books?"

"He said something about making a public announcement if Dumbledore tried to hide their existence saying they should be held in public trust at Hogwarts and be available for any scholars that wanted to study them. Harry isn't really that interested in them. He believes the dark arts are in general used only by short-sighted fools and the unimaginative, given the links between the dark arts and insanity, sterility and the disfiguring tendencies practitioners of the dark arts experience.

"I hadn't made the connection but in his mum's journal she gave him information about the links and he has decided that although he may learn about the Dark Arts he will never practice them. He actually stated he would prefer in this instance for me to do the research and to summarize what I find. I think it's a wise choice because I'll never have the power to work the spells. I'm lucky to be able to levitate a book across a room. It's easier to walk across the room and pick it up."

Felicia was mildly stunned. It was a very sensible solution. Harry, even as young as he was, was a powerful wizard, but it definitely made sense. By not studying the spells directly he could find out about them with no one claiming he was dark or had dark intentions. That was not to say Albus Dumbledore wouldn't do his best to try to block Harry, because he would. One thing Felicia had observed as a muggleborn who was originally meant for Slytherin, Albus Dumbledore liked control and he liked to be the person others came to for answers. In this instance she was sure of what he would do, stall for as long as he could. "That's very sound planning on yours and Harry's part. I'll let Steven know to prep paperwork to get court permission for you."

"Start by asking for Harry to have access to all of it, then allow them to talk you down to complete access for me, specific access for

Harry on just the spell that gave him the Slytherin family magics and on the family magics themselves until he gets his OWLs. "

"That should seem reasonable enough. Now I need to discuss something else with you."

"Alright."

"What is your opinion of Petunia Dursley and what kind of parent she has been to Harry?"

Cassandra almost froze. This she knew was a very sensitive topic to Harry. Harry had confided in her during one of his weaker moments over the summer. She knew from that conversation exactly what kind of relationship existed between Harry and his aunt. She also knew that Harry, unhappy and hurt by his aunt's indifference though he was, wouldn't tolerate interference in that relationship. "It doesn't matter what their relationship is Felicia, he will not look kindly on any interference."

"Then you feel there is something not right about it?"

"I don't like...Harry knows it for what it is and accepts its limitations. He will not accept outside efforts to change it, he would react poorly to any such efforts. As for Petunia she prefers to pretend the magical world doesn't exist and gets very unhappy when reminded that it does. I think that forcing her to acknowledge it makes things worse. It is one of the reasons that Harry hired me, to make it easier for Petunia to have her pretend. Let me be explicitly clear. I know you are concerned about Harry. I am too, but it is Harry's business and Harry's alone. Interference, even if it is only his trustees with the best of intentions, will only make him angry. He is already an isolated person. He trusts only a few. To interfere on this topic would be a breach of his trust and once trust is lost Harry is not the sort to offer it again. Do you understand?"

Felicia swallowed to try and dispel the lump that had formed in her throat and blinked back the prickle of tears. "I understand. Is there ...I want for Harry to know I care about him as more than a source of money and prestige. You seem to know him well, what do you think would send that message to him?"

"Treat him with respect, treat him like a person with thought and feelings. Last summer you trustees put him into a heavy study schedule without consulting either him or Petunia. He was fine with that since he needed the information eventually, but would you have done that to your own son? Harry handled it, but the lack of respect that it implied wasn't a good thing. Harry, for all he's only thirteen, thinks more like an adult than a child. Treat him like one.

"For another thing did any of you trustees acknowledge his birthday last summer? Do any of you know his hobbies? Do you even know his favorite color or what electives he's taking at Hogwarts?"

Felicia felt like she had just received a scolding from her mother. Here she was being critical of Petunia Dursley but she wasn't much better where Harry was concerned. "Do you know what his plans for the holidays are?"

"Well obviously not many invitations are out yet, but Harry has left instructions that if the Longbottoms or any of you trustees were to extend an invitation I was to accept. I've also been instructed to engage a private room at the Leaky Cauldron the day after the Express returns for a meeting between Harry and his godfather."

"Cassandra, I...thank you. You were right to rebuke me and the other trustees. Petunia may not be the best guardian, but we've made mistakes too. Harry did a very wise thing when he hired you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Corner. I like being Harry's assistant. It's easy for me to look out for his interests because he's become like a little brother to me. Actually, he's closer than my brothers. Harry looks at me and sees someone capable with thoughts and feelings who is more than an almost squib. My own brothers were always too ashamed of me for me to feel close to them. Harry sees what I can do not what I can't."

"Do you know what electives he's taking, Cassandra?"

"Yes, Ma'am. Harry's taking Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, and Care of Magical Creatures."

"Thank you." Felicia went home in a thoughtful mood. She thought about what she and the other trustees had failed to do. She thought

about how she and Stephen, at least, could rectify their oversight. The next day she called Petunia from a telephone in a hotel room.

"The Dursley residence, Petunia speaking."

"Yes, Petunia, It's Felicia Corner. I was hoping to arrange a time for us to chat. Perhaps we could get together for tea at Claridge's next week?"

"That would be lovely. Thursday perhaps?"

" At three?"

"That would work. If I can't get a sitter for Rose would you mind my bringing her? She'll probably sleep though."

"That would be fine. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

At Claridge's nearly a week and a half later Petunia smiled at Felicia as she handed her her cup of tea. "So, Felicia, what prompted the invitation?"

"I just wanted to discuss Harry and his summer next year. It was recently pointed out to me that we trustees overstepped last summer. Where's Rose?"

"She's being babysat by her biological mother. As to the overstepping, yes, unfortunately. Sadly, it's not the first time you all overstepped the boundaries of polite behavior."

"Yes," Felicia flushed slightly in shame. "Anyway, I don't want to repeat previous mistakes and I thought I would consult you regarding Harry and his plans for next summer."

Petunia arched an eyebrow.

"Harry told Neville Longbottom that he hoped for more time behind his easel this coming summer."

"That doesn't surprise me. Harry spent most of his waking moments last summer studying. He didn't even get to spend half of his normal

time at the dojo. I don't recall if he ever even picked up his sketchbook, which is such a shame because he is such a good artist. Have you ever seen his work?"

"Some just rough sketches, when he and Jack were doing his wardrobe."

"A pity. You should ask him to show you his portfolio. As far as next summer, I had told Dudley and Harry that when they were fifteen that I would be seeing to it that they learned dances other than just the waltz. Dudley requested that he get those lessons next summer, he's finally noticing girls and he's noticed that at the Smeltings and St. Catherine's social functions that the boys who know how to dance are more successful with girls. I was planning on enrolling both of them at the studio's ballroom dance camp for six weeks, and we were thinking of going to Brighton for a week."

"I see. Then I suppose Harry's extra curricular studies should be limited to his school studies and his family magics." Felicia noticed the frown that crossed Petunia's face at the word magics. She wondered what it had been like for Harry growing up and seeing that frown every time he did accidental magic. "I do apologize for last summer. Tiberius felt it would be best for Harry to ... I guess I should be frank. Harry tends to come across as somewhat arrogant. We thought that he should take the class because most students fail it the first time they take the test, we thought it would humble him a little."

"So last summer was about setting him up to fail?"

"Yes."

"And did he?"

"No."

Petunia frowned at the woman across from her. "Mrs. Corner, if you or the other trustees ever set up my nephew to fail again, I will remove any influence you have over him is that clear?"

"Yes, and in retrospect I don't blame you. If someone had done that to my sons or daughters I would hex them into next week if not next

month. We just don't want Harry's attitude to turn others against him. His house already works against him in that department."

"Harry has inherited high position among you correct?"

"Yes."

"He is regarded as a hero for ending the last war?"

"Yes."

"Does he lord either of those facts over others? Rub it in?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Then I think that it is you trustees who have the problem, not my nephew. You feel inferior when faced with his strong natural ability and competence. His justifiable pride in himself and his own accomplishments offends you and leaves you feeling that you are a lesser being, and in true human fashion you sought to humble him.

"You magicals disgust me, you love to lord your magic over those of us without it, but you're just as human as the rest of us. You see someone above you and you respond by trying to tear them down just like the rest of humanity. Then you have the nerve to think yourselves superior, that you have the right to make choices not just for yourselves but for those of us without magic. Let me tell you something: relationships aren't something you can fix with a wave of the wand. My biggest hope for my nephew is that he has learned this from me, because I know there is no way he can learn it from your kind."

Felicia felt herself flush with shame because Petunia had unknowingly just repeated a criticism of the magical world her own mother had told her about relationships. She hadn't looked at the trustees' actions in that light but she could see how Petunia might. "You have a point that we tend to put ourselves above non magicals and we won't make that mistake again. But-

"You are right you won't. In the future you all will consult me before making decisions about my nephew because you have already done it twice if it happens again I will find someone else. Am I making myself perfectly clear?"

"Yes." Felicia felt rather chagrined. This really hadn't gone at all the way she had planned. She had planned to take Petunia to task but instead she was the one getting the scolding. It occurred to her that this sort of controlling the situation was exactly the kind of thing that Harry did. Petunia was probably where he had learned it from. "I-we still feel that Harry tends to be..."

"Arrogant wasn't it? Does he sneer at people? Insult them without cause? Pick fights? Or does he defend himself, use his intelligence to his own advantage, and think for himself rather than blindly believing what people tell him? I will not punish my nephew for being his own person.

"It is a far better thing that he thinks and acts on his own convictions than being the stupid sycophant to Albus Dumbledore that his bullying, smug, "I am superior because I am magical" father was, or the weak follow the rules and too soft to stand up to authority person that my sister was.

"I loved Lily, she was one of the warmest, kindest, and most book smart people I ever knew but she was human and had her flaws. Her temper for one, but she was brave enough to do the right thing and died defending her child. Point of fact she had her doubts about Dumbledore's plans and rather than stand up and confront those in authority she did as she was instructed by that old man and she died for it. My family has paid the price for the magical world's arrogance.

"Megalomaniacs in our world are caught and either killed or imprisoned. So don't tell me that I have raised my nephew as an arrogant..." Petunia stopped took several deep breaths then continued. "I raised him to see both the strengths and weaknesses of the people around him, all people; not to be a blind fool who believes that because he can do magic that affects others that he automatically should. He believes that magic is a tool and that with power comes responsibility. That is something the magical world would do well to learn."

Felicia nodded miserably. This really had not gone the way she envisioned.

Chapter 43

Harry got letters from Cassandra, Petunia and oddly enough Felicia Corner which detailed what had been said by all parties during recent meetings. He felt vaguely comforted by his aunt's defense; maybe she didn't love him but at least she gave a damn about his well-being and what sort of person he grew up to be. He was vaguely pissed at his trustees for their attitudes and he was grateful for Cassandra. School was going well. Amazingly unlike the previous years Draco Malfoy didn't try to start anything. Harry and Hermione's friendly rivalry continued and it became clear they they would probably be the students in their year to get Head Boy and Girl. Hermione was still first in their class but Harry made her work for it.

Hermione was puzzled. She knew Harry was very intelligent, and she knew he outclassed her on the practical application in half the classes. But she couldn't figure out why he usually didn't include all the extra research she was sure they both did on his essays. She depended on that little bit extra to stay ahead of Harry. In everyone's class but Snape's that worked. This year though she intended to completely outclass him because she was taking every subject. That was until the day she came across him reading an advanced algebra book.

"What are you doing?"

"Algebra."

"Why?"

"Do you mind, Hermione, I'm trying to figure this out. As to why? It's pretty simple: I intend to take IGCSE tests in August year after next. Which means I have to learn this and I really don't want to be distracted right now. Come back in an hour."

She had known Harry spent vast amounts of time studying. She knew that aside from the times he scheduled for martial arts and exercise in the mornings, quidditch, his chess matches with Ron Weasley every fortnight, and the odd half an hour three times each week when he would sketch he actually spent most the rest of his waking hours studying or tutoring others. She realized that she always assumed that he was only studying magic, but it was

something of a kick in the teeth to realize that he was studying to take qualification tests in the muggle world too. She spent most her time in the summer studying things so she could take the qualifications but she wasn't planning to take them for three more years.

Time passed quietly for the most part. When the first quidditch match rolled around the excitement thrummed throughout the school. Gryffindor had three Weasleys on the team. Young Ginny Weasley was the Gryffindor seeker, and rumor had it she was quite good.

Marcus called the Slytherin team together before the game. "All right everyone, listen up. There are people who say we snakes can't play a clean game and win. They're liars, and today I want us to prove it. With me, Adrian and Draco as chasers, Monty as keeper, Harry as seeker, and Ferris and Charles as beaters this team is second to none. Today there is a scout out there looking at me and Wood. I want a clean game and not just because over half their team are girls, but because a dirty game will prove nothing to that scout. I know we can fly clean and beat the lions with style if we stick together and play the way we have in practice. Harry, keep a close eye out for the snitch, but draw out the game. I would prefer that you not catch it before a hundred points get scored. But rumor has Ginny Weasley as being good, if she goes for it before that you need to get there first it shouldn't be a huge problem she's on a Cleansweep and you've got a Nimbus. Got it?"

"Understood. Do you want me to fly interference at all?"

"You're good and in any other circumstance my answer might be yes, but unless their chasers get them up around a hundred points up on us because we're playing like gentlemen the answer is no."

"If we're being gentlemen, does that mean we can't hit the bludgers at the girls?" Ferris asked.

Most of the team bit back snickers as Marcus and Harry in unintentional matching gestures put a hand to their foreheads and rubbed them for a moment.

"No, Ferris, hit the bludgers at them all you want. Remember they may be girls, but by coming out on the pitch they take themselves out of the realm of being ladies."

"Got it."

"Let's go."

Over the dull roar of the crowd the voice of Gryffindor Lee Jordan was heard as he announced first the Gryffindor team then the Slytherin teams. "...Seeker Harry Potter. This should be quite a matchup today. Not only are these two houses notorious rivals on and off the pitch, but the Weasleys have a grudge against the Slytherin seeker. There's the toss and Gryffindor is in possession.. Chaser Katie Bell takes a shot. Oh! Rebounded off the Slytherin Keeper Montague into Slytherin's possession. Flint has it and passes off to Malfoy, Puccey, back to Malfoy. OUCH! Malfoy caught a glancing blow by a bludger hit by one of the Weasley twins. He lost the quaffle to Angelina Johnson who shoots. Scores. 10 points to Gryffindor! But the snakes are coming back with a powerful play by the captain Marcus Flint. He shoots. Scores! The game is tied."

Harry mostly tuned out the announcer at that point only keeping aware of the score and what his fellow seeker was up to. He noticed as Ginny went into a dive and after a half a moment of following he abandoned the chase because she was trying to feint him. She realized quickly that he wasn't buying it and they settled into watching for the snitch. They flew around the game and each other for awhile, then she decided to try another feint. The score by this time had reached one hundred ten to ninety with the Gryffindors in the lead. Harry looked but didn't see the snitch in front of her then out of the corner of his eye he spotted the snitch on the opposite side of the field. Harry went after it shaking his head and laughing as Jordan announced. "Ginny Weasley is diving, she must see the snitch...Wait Potter is leaning forward and diving towards the opposite side of the pitch? Potter has captured the snitch. Slytherin wins two hundred thirty to one hundred ten. This is probably one of the cleanest games we've ever seen between these two houses."

Harry calmly landed and was quickly joined by his teammates, for the post game handshakes. Before the lions landed Harry had a fun idea. "Guys, guys how about instead of shaking the girls hands we kiss the back of their hands instead." His teammates quickly agreed knowing it would bother the Gryffindor girls.

Wood was the first through the line and Harry, not wanting his hand to be crushed, was careful about how he let the burly older boy take his hand. He bit back a snicker as Johnson came through with an expression of disbelief and disgust. Spinnet also wore an expression of disgust and after Harry she was wiping her hand off on her robes. Bell was even funnier refusing to go through the line. Miss Weasley was cannier though; with a challenging glare she went through. Last came Fred and George they had the intention of trying to reassert the dominance of the Lions. Harry was as careful shaking their hands as he had been with Wood.

When the Slytherins entered their common room they were still laughing about how they had messed with the Gryffindors heads. Professor Snape joined them long enough to congratulate them, then departed. After he left some of the more enterprising seventh years pulled out the butterbeer and the whole house partied. Harry celebrated with his teammates for an hour then went to his room to study.

A week later Harry received a surprise invitation.

Dear Harry,

Perenelle and I wish to invite you to spend your winter break with us at our country house in Bourgogne. It will be an opportunity for you to practice your French, for you and I to discuss alchemy and politics, and for Perenelle to tell you the legend of the wizard Beltharion. I realize that you may already have plans with your family but if not please consider doing this. Perenelle has many rare histories in her book collection and I know we would enjoy your company. If you come we will probably include a trip to the Strasbourg market and we will certainly include a two day foray into Paris.

Your friend, N.F.

Harry pulled out his mirror to Cassandra. "Sandra."

"Yes, Harry."

"Have you gotten invites from the Longbottoms or the Ogdens yet?"

"No."

"Good. Don't accept them."

"What? But Harry-"

"I got a better invitation."

"Who?" Cassandra thought carefully about who Harry knew, "Oh wait, you can't mean-the Flamels? Do you have any idea how much most people would pay for an invite like that? I mean there are some that would even kill for that sort of invitation."

"I know. So could you call Aunt Petunia and let her know. I suppose you should also tell the trustees. That way they don't feel slighted when I don't accept their invites this year. I think if I still send them Christmas gifts it should be okay. Oh and contact Jack; we'll have to figure out another time to do the consult on my wardrobe. Tell him I'll send him sketches and my ideas. My growth has slowed a little the last month or so I think my current wardrobe will suffice until spring."

"Will do. Are you going to send your response from school?"

"I'd like to, but I think you should check with Aunt Petunia first. So I'll pen it and send it on to you, once she okays it you can send it on via Hedwig. No other owl will get through."

"Okay."

"I've got class."

"I figured. I'll call your aunt in a bit."

"Sounds good."

Cassandra made a point of explaining to Petunia just how prestigious the invitation from the Flamels was before asking if she had permission to forward Harry's response. She wasn't terribly surprised when Petunia asked her to contact Felicia Corner and ask her to tea in Surrey. Of all the trustees Petunia was still the most comfortable with Felicia. After she got off the phone she flooed to the offices of Corner, Davies, and Ogden. She knew there would be a brief wait but she didn't expect it to take long.

Two hours later she was practically dancing. She had procured not only the permission of Harry's trustees, but she had been told to not forward Harry's response to the Flamels until she had invitations for the Flamels to their parties as well.

Cassandra really liked working for Harry, she revelled in the freedom she had as Harry's assistant. Her father was a staunch pureblood. Women in his mind should be decorative and obedient. He had been pleased that three of the ten children he had forced on her mother didn't suffer from the Yaxley "curse", but had been furious that Cassandra's magic had proved to be so weak. He had thought of her as property to be sold away to his own advantage. Thanks to Harry she'd been able to thumb her nose at his plans.

Harry treated her with respect she usually didn't get from anyone in the magical world. Her pay wasn't outstanding but the benefits were hard to beat. The apartment, an expense account that allowed her to go out to the theater once a month and to the cinema weekly, the fact that the work she did was very interesting, and the fact that he had quietly arranged that two nights a weeks she had access to a tutor so she could get her muggle qualifications had made it so she had no regrets about working for someone so much younger than her.

Of course one of the things neither of them announced to either Petunia or the trustees was that Cassandra quietly fed Harry information on anything and everything he wanted to know. Cassandra for all her weak magic hadn't been in Ravenclaw for nothing. She understood the magical world very well, and with her help Harry was rapidly overcoming the handicap of being raised in the muggle world, in fact he was turning it into a strength by taking advantage of muggle technology, information availability and a more global viewpoint.

Sirius hadn't been given a choice by Paige. She had half bullied, half coaxed him into recognizing his own faults. Sirius now wished he had taken a different tack and waited until he was better before talking to Harry. Instead he'd judged his godson based on a robe, based on his own prejudice and now his godson refused to have anything to do with him. Remus talked about how Harry had friends in all the houses.

Harry might have disappointed him by being in Slytherin, but the truth was James hadn't been like Sirius' parents. James and Lily, while possibly a bit disappointed, would have been proud of Harry regardless of the house he was sorted into. He had failed the cousin he loved best and honorary brother in so many ways. He was sure that until he managed to mend things with Harry, there would be no forgiveness in the afterlife for him. It hadn't been Albus Dumbledore who got him free of prison, no, it had been his godson. Sirius had trouble sleeping from guilt stacked upon guilt about the ways his godson had risen above the call of duty, and in all the ways he had failed in his.

He had asked Paige how she would apologize if she were him. Her answer had been far from comforting. "Grovel, then grovel some more, he's Slytherin so find out what matters to him, find ways you can help him, expect nothing back when you give him what he wants on a silver platter then expect to grovel some more. Oh, and did I say grovel? Then when it's all said and done be sure you thank him for the opportunity to grovel."

"I was afraid of that. Is that really how he struck you?"

"Actually I've never met him. His secretary, yes, him, no. She did the preliminary and thorough interview. Lord Potter merely made the offer in writing. In true Slytherin fashion he offered me a bargain I couldn't refuse. I base my recommendation on my knowledge of Slytherins in general.

"If I were you I would first stop writing your godson. Those ashes were rather eloquent. Instead I would seek out his secretary, win her over enough that she'll tell you how to earn a second, no, sorry, third chance with your godson."

"How do I find her?"

"Oh, no, I am not going to make this easy for you. The work might help your cause. Her name is Cassandra Yaxley, the rest is up to you."

Sirius heard the name Yaxley and cringed.

Three weeks later Sirius was feeling much more comfortable with the idea of seeking out Cassandra Yaxley. From what he'd been

able to find out she had been mostly disowned. Her family just hadn't done a casting out ceremony. It reminded him of himself. He wondered what she had done to gain the distinction. He decided to be Gryffindor about it all and sent her a note asking if they could meet.

Cassandra felt like snarling and throwing the book in her hands across the room, only her long ingrained habits of respect for books stopped her. She felt awful. Harry had given her a fairly simple research list this year but she was failing miserably just because she didn't have access to the right libraries.

Slytherin's library from the chamber would doubtlessly hold a lot of the information she needed but Albus Dumbledore was proving what an ignominious pain in the backside he could be. Cassandra figured she would have to wait at least three more months before she could look at those books. It would take that long to go through the courts. She packed up her materials and left the Edinburgh Magical Public Reading Room, and made her way back to the Kilted Wizard Pub where she floored back to the Leaky Cauldron.

When she arrived home an owl was waiting for her. She was very surprised it was from Sirius Black, and it requested a meeting.

Harry worked hard all through autumn term. As the holidays approached he sent Cassandra his Christmas shopping list, he also told her which she should wrap and forward to him for distribution, and which she should send for him. He also sent her the sketch book he had filled with instructions to get him another the same size. The numbered sketches of his group of friends was to be taken out and framed before being sent to him and the rest were to be sent on to Jack along with a bottle of Rosemerta's Oak matured mead.

Harry had originally been startled by how much slush was in his trust fund. His first wardrobe with Jack to his surprise had only left a momentary dip in the balance. The goblins were that good at profitable enterprise. He guessed his dad must have been one spoiled and mean SOB, based on his trust fund and how much Professor Snape hated them both.

Harry took money seriously. He never blindly threw money at anything. To him money was first and foremost a tool. A tool that

when carefully used was extremely useful. Money could be used for many things. Harry had been taught by his family's actions about how money could influence others. How money was useful in shaping the impressions of others. Thanks to his uncle he understood how a little money spent on others could buy him goodwill from those that didn't know him. The fundamental principle that the most important name to an individual is their own, by sending a small gift or a card Harry could give the impression that these other people were important to him whether they actually were or not. Money made this easy, but it also was a reason that Harry made a point of more personalized gifts to those who were really important to him. Thanks to Cassandra he now knew which charities existed in the magical world, and he made a point to support the ones he felt best matched his values.

In the year and a half she had worked for him Cassandra had proven her worth several times over by knowing who should be acknowledged and keeping track of dates for him. She had not only researched people for his dossiers, she had also quietly set up information networks about the ministry and the Wizengamot so she could keep track of persons of interest. Now that Harry had a better handle on his own income, he felt more comfortable deciding his expenses which was why in addition to a Christmas bonus Cassandra was getting a raise for Christmas.

Finally autumn term came to an end. Harry had distributed presents to his friends and had packed his trunk. Cassandra was meeting him at King's Cross with the two stage portkey and his travel papers for his trip and the presents for the Flamels.

Chapter 44 Christmas '93 Part 1

Harry came to a stop after activating the second portkey that took him to the Flamel home. Harry's portkey had dropped him twenty yards inside a low stone wall. In the distance Harry could see fields; they were standing in a vineyard.

"Harry?"

"Mr. Flamel?" Harry was facing a elderly gentleman that reminded him of the actor Richard Attenborough. He had the slightly rounded figure and white hair of an older man but the posture and an energy that made Harry think he was very fit. He wore jeans, a sheepskin coat, over a chamois shirt and a stocking cap.

"Call me Nic, or Oncle Nic if it makes you more comfortable, and I shall call you Harry, alright? Now I'm sure a modern boy like yourself would prefer to be in something other than those robes. So let's get you up to the house and you can get comfortable."

Harry grinned. "Sounds good."

"Was your journey okay?"

"Yes, thanks for setting it up that my processing at customs was expedited."

"Not a problem. I always have people in the French Ministry that are anxious to do me favors. Idiots that they frequently are."

"I can imagine."

"Sorry about the walk, but with our layered wards we don't have magical ways into the manor. It also helps control the feedback and protects the electronics in the house."

"You have electronics?"

"Yes, Nell and I mostly disassociated ourselves from magicals when the separatists got into power three centuries ago. Fools that they were. We are all still human after all. Non-magicals for all they lack magic make up for it in sheer drive and creativity. Living amongst them is what keeps Nell and I young and inventive. Here we are."

They had walked at a fairly fast pace for about eight minutes and they approached a two-story stone manor. They walked in the open gate and were now out of the cold wind that blown across the fields, and through the vineyard. Inside the walls there was a large yard with three sheds, one of which appeared to be made of industrial glass bricks.

"The first shed houses the generator and the cars. The second, some of the farming implements for the vineyard and the fields, and the third one with the glass is my laboratory. We will be spending some time there, mostly mornings. Nell wanted to claim your afternoons for history. I thought evenings could be spent relaxing by watching movies. I've got a Star Wars marathon planned and then you can pick some from our collection."

The house was large, about three times the size of the Dursley's house on Privet Drive. Nic paused and had Harry touch a bronze plate near the front door. "The wards will recognize you as a guest now, so you may enter and exit freely." He said. They went in through the vestibule. Nic shed his heavy boots and put on a pair of house shoes.

Harry pulled out and tapped his trunk and pulled his own from it so he could follow suit. While he had it open he pulled the host and hostess gifts he had brought with him. Then they entered the house proper.

"Nell!"

An older woman, whom Harry thought looked like a petite Helen Mirren, came bustling into the foyer, "Here I am husband, no need to shout, and this must be Harry. Il est beau.(He is handsome.)"

Harry blushed a little. "Merci, Madame, vous êtes très gentille.(You are very kind)."

"Bon(Good), Nic had told me you needed help with your français, but that was very well done."

"A friend at school is fluent and has been tutoring me in exchange for help with transfiguration, but I look forward to working on my fluency while I'm here. This is for you."

The set of cashmere gloves, scarf, and beret were a simple gift, but he hoped a welcome one. He also planned to buy her a silk scarf of her choice in Paris. He then handed Nic the shrunken box of lab equipment he had had Cassandra purchase in London. "For you, sir." Harry had a five year old bottle of Rosemerta's Oak Matured Mead that he would give them on Christmas morning and he hoped to sketch both of them at some point.

Nell opened the hostess gift. "How lovely, the gloves look warm. Merci beaucoup, je n'ai jamais maîtrisé la réalisation de gants.(Thank you very much, I never mastered making gloves)" She watched to see if he understood.

Harry thought hard. The thanks was easy enough, ne jamais meant never, des gants meant gloves. The rest had been too fast for him to match it to words he knew. "Maîtrisé?"

"Mastered." she provided.

"la réalisation?"

"Making."

"Nell grew up in the era when women were supposed to have such skills. My parents were horrified when I chose a woman so lacking in such skills as my bride, when they had negotiated a match that was from their view far superior, Margarite had looks, housewifely skills and a sizable dowry-"

"Nic-"

"Yes, my love?"

"Four words, fervens increbresco saeta absentis."

An almost panicked look passed across Nic's face. "Of course. What my dear departed parents didn't realize was that Perenelle's research skills made her a far better catch than any housewifely sort they could have picked for me. Margarite for all her attractions couldn't read a word, and if it weren't for Nell's research capabilities we would have died long ago." Nic got a relieved look as a smug look crossed his wife's face.

Harry got the inkling that this was an oft repeated interchange between the two. He recognized the four words as Latin which made him wonder if it was a spell. Whatever it was it clearly placed Perenelle Flamel on equal footing with her famous husband. Rather than the male dominant sort of marriage that would have been the norm in the era of their youth. "I'm glad you like them Madame Flamel."

"None of that, You can call me Tante(Aunt) Nell. Now let's get you settled."

The rest of that day and the next few days were very different from anything Harry had ever experienced before. His aunt and uncle had always been stiff with him and his Christmases with Neville had always been colored by the formality demanded by the Dowager Countess Longbottom. The Flamels were casual, they teased each other and there was little to no formality in their home.

The first morning when Nic had come downstairs to breakfast in zebra print charmeuse pajama bottoms and a lime green T-shirt with the saying Knowledge is power- why are you defenseless? printed on it. Harry couldn't help himself: he had first choked on his tea then sprayed it. Nell had laughed with Nic. They both teased Harry for coming down dressed for the day, considering they were both in pajamas, though Nell wore a robe over hers. For the first two days of his visit his mornings were spent in Nic's lab where he started learning more about the intricacies of alchemy, and over the various experiments they discussed the nature of magic itself. The afternoons were spent with Perenelle. The first afternoon she quizzed him to establish how much magical history he had learned and on the second afternoon she had thrown her hands up in disgust.

"Better than I would have expected, but how Albus expects any of the children of Hogwarts to understand history or its significance, when he uses the text by Bathilda Bagshot and that ghost to teach I'll never understand."

"What's wrong with the book?"

"Bathilda seldom looked beyond the obvious and almost never asked the question why did this happen. She merely says thus and

such happened. She certainly never cross-referenced it with events outside the magical world. Furthermore, she almost completely neglects to mention Gellert Grindelwald mostly because she didn't want anyone to make the connection between them."

Harry's interest was instantly piqued. Cassandra's dossier on Dumbledore had connected the old man to Godric's Hollow and Bathilda Bagshot. Cassandra said the older woman had let slip that there was some connection between the old man and Grindelwald but had cut herself off saying it would cost her too much. Royalties on History of Magic being the older woman's source of income and Dumbledore using it as the text, if it was a bad one, smacked of a payoff. Cassandra was still investigating. But maybe he could find out something. "What do you mean?"

Perenelle caught herself, and looked sharply at the young man beside her. His posture was relaxed but his emerald eyes held an intensity that spoke of great interest. She paused. Unlike Nic who trusted Albus within certain parameters, Perenelle had always held that Albus wasn't completely trustworthy. He had come and studied with Nic seventy years ago. His intentions had been altruistic but he seldom ever acknowledged his own darker side. He had always held himself as if he was greater than his fellow man, especially where those without magic were concerned. Some of that had been pardonable pride because he was quite intelligent and gifted with magic, but she and Nic had never agreed about his trustworthiness. She had always felt he was too much in the the ends justify the means camp, while Nicholas pointed to the fact that Fawkes the phoenix bonded to him. She reluctantly decided to hold her tongue.

Harry read her pause and then her decision. "Since you disapprove, what books do you think I should study instead?"

Perenelle bit back a chuckle, this one was indeed sharp. It saddened her though, for a child of thirteen to be this canny it usually meant a less than loving family. Well, perhaps she and Nic could take up some of the slack. Those invitations from the boy's trustees spoke of others trying to puff up their importance by riding on Harry's coattails. Not something she and Nic would ever support. "Don't worry. I'll see you get what you need. Come on, I'll show you the vault."

Harry followed her to what he assumed were steps to the basement. The manor house while large had a simple floor plan. The main floor held the kitchen, which connected to a formal dining room via a butler's pantry and a breakfast room which was where they had eaten all of their meals so far. Then there was a pantry that doubled as a laundry room, a music and entertainment room, a formal drawing room, a study, a guest water closet and the master suite. The second floor had two guest bedrooms and a full bathroom. The remaining six rooms had all been converted, two to a library of modern literature and the other four into what Harry could only think of as the world's largest walk-in closet. There were clothes of every century and style that Nic and Nell had lived in, everything from medieval robes to hippy bellbottom leisure suits. He imagined that they probably had clothes from the current decade in a magically expanded closet in the master suite. He followed Perenelle into the cellar which housed a deep freeze, some wine racks and shelves of canned goods. She led him past the shelves to a concealed door. Where they met more steps, that lead downward.

"So what is in this vault?" Harry asked.

"The accumulated library of Nicholas and I, we have a lot of preservation spells on the books and scrolls, and conditions are easier to control in the cave complex that Nicolas had the goblins dig for us." She opened the door at the base of this second set of stairs. "Clean your hands with a scourgify, dear."

Harry pulled his wand, "I'm not going to get in trouble for this, am I?"

"A scourgify? Of course not." Then she noticed his wand. "Mon Dieu(My God!)!"

"Tante Nell?"

"Ta baguette."

"My wand, what about it?"

"Puis-je l'examiner?(May I examine it?)"

Harry handed her the wand.

Perenelle was amazed. She had read legends of elemental wands and those that wielded them. The legends she had read compared them to wizards and witches that had to use a staff. Two hundred years ago when they had been in India she had learned a fair bit about them. She had even acquired a book about an Indian Princess that was a witch who used one.

Historically in addition to their bearers wielding great power, they had unusual cores. The one in her book had had a makara tail feather as a core. Wand lore said these wands enabled their users to harness not just the energies of life that all magicals used but the powers of the earth itself. The balancing stone was said to tie the wand to the mental needs of the user. The one documented in the book had been bound in copper and set with a star sapphire. It had had runes in ancient Sanskrit. She wondered why Harry's was bound in silver. She mentally noted the many runes on the wand, and translated them mentally as she went: Fehu, abundance and/or luck, Uruz, physical strength, Kenaz, vision and/or creativity, Hagalaz, wrath of nature, Eihwaz, strength and endurance, Algiz, protection, Sowilo, life force and honor, Tiwaz, honor, justice and authority, Mannaz, intelligence of self and humanity, Laguz, life energy and renewal, Dagaz, awareness and change/transformation through force of will.

"C'est incroyable. Quel est le coeur?"(It's incredible. What is the core?)

Harry was puzzled for a moment. "Snow Phoenix," He found himself wanting to share something that only he and Cassandra knew, "Hedwig's, I think."

Perenelle suddenly understood his interest in the mythic creatures and knowing what had been in the Helegutas journals she suddenly understood his interest in Beltharion. "Do the spell now, s'il te plaît."(If you please.)

Harry took his wand back and a second later his hands were spelled clean. He followed Perenelle through the door and promptly gasped. Hogwarts was reputed to have the largest library of magical books in the world. But the library in front of him was easily twice if not three times its size. "Oh my..." he said almost reverently.

"Do you like my collection?" Perenelle asked with a smile. "No one but Nic and myself have ever seen the whole collection before. You are the first I have ever brought here, not even Albus has been here. Over half the collection was in storage while he was Nicolas' student. This vault was a gift to me for our 600th anniversary."

"It's amazing."

"Come I will show you. As I do, I wish to pass on the rules. No food and no drink in the vault, no live flame. Spells are set so that the vault illuminates when someone enters. If you need additional lighting please use lumos." She led him to a book that sat open on a lectern, with a capped ink bottle and a quill next to it. Next to the lectern there was a bin. "You grew up muggle and how do you find a book in a muggle library?"

"You use either the card catalog or a computer."

"Exactement.(Exactly) This is a magical equivalent. To find a book you write the author, title, or subject and it will tell you where to find it. The shelves are numbered. And we use something similar to the Dewey decimals to arrange the books. A third of the library is non-magical, those books follow the Dewey system. Feel free to explore the library and learn the magical equivalent. When you are finished studying with a book you place it in the bin. Spells will re-shelve it."

"That sounds better than Madame Pince. She always seems to begrudge helping us find books, and I think she resents having to re-shelve books too. Maybe you should send her the spells so she could apply them at Hogwarts."

"Je crois que c'est une question de degré. Les charmes pour le remplacement des livres travaillent seulement si le plus de la collection est enplace. Je ne suis pas sûr qu'ils travailleraient pour la bibliothèque de Hogwarts." (I think it's a question of degree. the spells to replace the books only work if most the books are in place. I am not sure they would work in the Hogwarts library.)

Harry winced. He liked Tante Nell being willing to help him work on his French, but her tendency to bounce back and forth between French and English was frustrating. He worked his way through what she had said; crois as she'd used it must mean think. Her second sentence was completely beyond him so he said it back to

her phrased as a question. "Les charmes pour le remplacement des livres travaillent seulement si le plus de la collection est en place?"

"The spells for the replacement of books only work if most of the collection is in place."

"And you don't think they would work for the library at Hogwarts?"

"Bon. Your French is better than you claimed in your letter to Nic."

"Yes, well... blame Daphne." Harry couldn't help but blush as he said it. His last two attempts to ask her to Hogsmeade with him hadn't gone any better than the first. He was beginning to think that maybe Daphne was trying to give him a gentle brush-off, not wanting to hurt his feelings, but he intended to try once more, this time being direct so there could be no confusion. If she was trying to brush him off at least he would know.

"Qui est Daphne?"(Who is Daphne?)

"She's-"

"En français, s'il te plaît."(In French , if you please)

"Elle est une fille dans l'école." Harry said somewhat a girl in school)

"Elle est une fille à l'école." Nell corrected. "Est-ce qu'elle est attirante?"(She's a girl at school. Is she attractive?)

Harry took a second then he blushed. "Elle est très belle.""She's very pretty.)

"Bon. Now what things do you want most to learn?"

"Nic said you could tell me the legend of Beltharion. I want to learn about that the most. I want to learn what the significance of my wand is. Ollivander and Thaddeus Marcello both reacted oddly to my wand. I would like to know why. You reacted similarly, so I believe you might be able to tell me why. Other than that I want to learn as much as you are willing teach and I am able to learn."

Alright, I cannot tell you the legend of Beltharion, the legend itself has passed into the mists of time. I can however tell you something about it.

"In the time before the fall of Atlantis those who worked magic lived as if they were gods, those without magic were like ants waiting to be stepped on in the battles between the powerful. Atlanteans ruled the earth, some say in their arrogance they angered the Creator. Beltharion was a wizard, a very powerful one that didn't agree with the rulers of the day. The Creator gave him a special familiar, a beautiful bird whose feathers were white that was a raptor who could vanish and reappear in a swirl of snow. Beltharion lived in a troubled time. He was credited with the destruction of Atlantis. For two centuries after he died he was counted as a dark wizard. Then when the oracle at Delphi was established their greatest seer was given a vision, a vision of what would have happened had Beltharion not acted and destroyed Atlantis. That vision was nothing less than the destruction of the world. After that most references to him refer to him as the Grey Mage." Nell finished. "He's only mentioned in a few ancient Greek texts and he is only rarely mentioned."

"I can see why. Was he dark?"

"In the sense of did he do dark magic? I don't know, that detail has been lost to time. Did he have to do something that was seen as bad, yes. Did he do it for the right reasons? If the Oracle at Delphi is to be believed, then yes he did. Did he have other options available to him? Probably, I don't know.

"One thing to keep in mind, Harry, is that magic- for all many people like to claim this spell or that spell is dark- very little magic truly is dark just as very little magic is truly light. Magic is mostly about intent. You think it, you believe it, you will it and it is thought made manifest. With the exception of most necromancy and some blood magic I hesitate to brand any magic as dark, likewise there are few spells that I consider light, except for ones like the patronus spell and most healing spells. The rest it is your intent that makes them so. Ministries the world over have labelled many spells as light or dark mostly because many spells can be misused and lend themselves to one or the other.

"As for your wand, you will be able to find the books you need. And we can discuss it over dinner this evening. Tomorrow we will be

going to Strasbourg so plan on only speaking French. The day after that is Christmas. Today is your only day for the next three to make use of the library, so get to work. Meanwhile I shall make a list of good history texts for you."

It took Harry most of the afternoon to learn the magical dewey system, but by the end he realized that it was sort of similar to the way the Hogwarts library was organized. Hogwarts' wasn't as exact however. He also found three books on wand lore which looked promising and one specifically on an elemental wand and magic that to his dismay was in Sanskrit. When he showed it to Nell she had laughed and then taught him a spell that would translate it for him. As the afternoon came to an end she told him he could leave the books on the worktable rather than re-shelve them.

The next day Nic and Harry visited the Gringotts branch in Paris early and Harry had his first experience with side along apparition. He decided he preferred portkey and floo to side along. Harry converted enough galleons to do the shopping he planned into francs. They apparated back to the manor then they apparated again to a point in Strasbourg. Harry had pocketed his dictionary but found within an hour or two he had mastered enough phrases that he was able to complete the shopping he wanted to. He found a glass blower that had a spectacular glass star for Aunt Petunia, and a baby's first Christmas ornament for Rose. He also bought an ornament for Cassandra. He bought a bottle of Spatlese and a boxed assortment of cookies and Swiss chocolates for Aunt Marge, and a similar gift for Cassandra and each of his trustees. He found a Swiss knife he knew Dudley would like. He searched for a gift for Uncle Vernon but was at a loss for what the man would like. That was until he saw a painting he thought his uncle might like. Gift shopping complete he started to take in more of his surroundings and converse more with the Flamels about what he was seeing and the history of the historic city. They also visited the building that housed the European parliament. They ate lunch and dinner in the city, and three hours after it got dark after they had had the chance to enjoy the city's many Christmas lights, they apparated home. Harry swiftly wrapped the gifts he'd purchased and sent them with Hedwig to his aunt, to Cassandra and to his trustees.

Christmas Day arrived and Harry opted to surprise the Flamels by making the delicious breakfast of quiche Lorraine, baked apples, and caramel and cinnamon rolls. That he had seen Nell plan for

them. Nell had been shocked when she came down to make breakfast and everything was already prepared and just needed to be put in the oven. She and Harry chatted and joked until Nic came down a half an hour later.

Today Harry couldn't resist commenting on Nic's sleep T-shirt. "Don't you think you have an unfair advantage Uncle Nic?"

"Huh?"

"Knowledge is a weapon. How come are you defenseless?" Harry gestured at the shirt. "I mean you and Tante Nell have had centuries to acquire your knowledge, no one else has a chance."

They all laughed and Nic said, "You have a point."

After breakfast they opened presents, most of which were Harry's from his friends. Most were candy or books or art related gifts but there were a couple of surprises. One that had arrived by a decrepit owl one had been a hand knit sweater in green that was accompanied by some homemade fudge that came from the Weasleys. The second which must have been snuck into the other gifts when he was packing was a practice snitch from Draco Malfoy. Harry was shocked to receive a gift from his fellow Slytherin especially when he knew the cost of the item. The Flamels appreciated the meal Harry had brought them, and Harry appreciated the journal they had gotten him to record the things he learned over the next year. After the presents the Flamels and Harry went to the kitchen where they worked together on a Christmas dinner of foie gras and truffle appetizer, roast goose with chestnut stuffing, potato gratin, pureed carrot and parsnips, peas, a spinach salad that had berries and a stilton cheese that served as a cheese course and a Yule log dessert.

Harry had his doubts about the appetizer but discovered that fresh seared foie gras served with black truffle, and a sprig of fresh marjoram on a wholegrain cracker was actually very good. Nic and Nell also opened various wines with each course and encouraged Harry to develop his palette for wine. He only had a taste of each wine they served, and by the end of dinner he had a better understanding of some wines.

The day after Christmas Harry resumed his studies with zest. As Harry read the books on wand lore he learned about how winning a wand in a duel won the loyalty of that wand to the victorious wizard or witch. But in this, as in all aspects of magic, intent counted. A wand won in a friendly match would stay true to its owner, but one won in a duel of intent would transfer its allegiance.

In reading the books on wand lore he found that every wood was associated with an element, which endowed the wand with certain characteristics that in turn strengthened the casters ability to do magic. Some woods were considered masculine, others feminine. He found mention of why wands with more than one wood had metal and stone as part of the wand. While a stone on a normal wand was merely decorative, one on a wand with more than one wood acted as a ground, preventing the magic of the woods from burning out the wand.

Harry went through and identified the traits of the woods of his wand, Maple was considered a masculine wood of the earth element and symbolic of life. Elder was also masculine, but it was of fire and symbolic of death but also of rebirth. Ebony was a feminine wood of water and symbolized darkness of night and the casting off of evil. Cedar the final wood in his wand was also feminine of air and symbolized life and light in the midst of darkness.

Harry read about wand cores quickly because there was no mention of snow phoenixes. Then he moved onto the book about the elemental wand from India. That wand had belonged to a powerful witch. She had been married to a prince and she used her magic to protect and defend his kingdom. Considering that kingdom had been the wealthiest she'd had her work cut out for her. All the woods in her wand had been feminine: ash, cherry, lilac and purpleheart. Harry didn't understand the significance of the fact her wand was grounded by a star sapphire and copper wire. The details about what spells the witch did, were sketchy as best, much to his disappointment, so after returning his current materials to the bin that would put them back he investigated metals and gems and elemental magic.

His search led him to discover that the sapphire was a gem that lent itself to spiritual awareness and that copper was highly conductive but only resonated on certain frequency. He found that his own silver wire was loosely connected to the moon but also that it meant

purity and light, his aquamarine was supposed to endow him with courage, foresight and happiness. Harry couldn't help but notice the thematic trend of his wand. He wondered about the balances that existed in it and what it meant for him.

That night over dinner he and the Flamels discussed light and dark magic, wine, and what spells were on the vault and Harry extracted a promise that they would teach him a light spell before he returned to England in a week.

Two days later they went to Paris for an overnight. Their first day Nic and Nell showed Harry where to find the French Ministry and then they took him to Rue de Magie Paris's equivalent to Diagon Alley. They went to Faubourg Saint Honoré and Montmartre for shopping the next day. Harry got Nell the scarf he planned as well as one that would be a birthday gift for Petunia. He also found the fabric stores of Montmartre wonderful and couldn't resist browsing through them. He found some fabulous fabric on sale and wound up spending all the francs he had in his pockets.

Nic couldn't resist, "Harry, you shop like my wife. Are you sure you're a boy?"

Perenelle noticed Harry stiffen slightly, before he replied, "I am an artist. Color, texture, the feel of things are hard for me to resist. As to shopping I learned at an early age to like it when I went with my aunt."

She frowned at her husband even after six and a half centuries he still opened his mouth and inserted his foot. He opened his mouth to tease Harry some more but she cut him off with a jab of her elbow to his ribs. She could tell that Harry did like shopping and didn't think it was fair for Nic who would be quite happy to never leave his laboratory to tease him about it.

Since Harry had spent all his money, they window-shopped a bit more then apparated home to the Manor.

The last four days of Harry's visit, Harry continued to learn alchemy from Nic but Perenelle instead of focusing on teaching him history taught him the Patronus Charm. It troubled both Harry and Perenelle that he had trouble coming up with a sufficiently happy memory to make the charm work. Harry had never before realized that while his

life to that point hadn't been a pile of woe it also lacked joyous moments. In the end it was memories of goofing around with Neville on the train after first year that finally allowed him to generate a patronus. On the day of his last lesson he felt comfortable enough that he finally asked her, "Tante Nell, that first day you said four words in Latin to Oncle Nic what were they about?"

Perenelle got an absolutely wicked grin then she went and pulled a book from a shelf and handed it to him.

Harry didn't recognize the language it was in, so he did the translations spell she had taught him. *Twenty Essential Personal Care Charms for Brazilian Witches*. Part of him didn't want to know, but there was another side of him, the prankster side of him, that said any spell that gave that reaction to someone had potential. So he opened the book and read. The spell was a charm designed to remove body hair it was accompanied by a numbing charm you were supposed to do first but it basically was a Brazilian hot wax in a spell. Harry couldn't help it. He guffawed. He guessed that Perenelle had found this spell on their travels and apparently she had either used it or threatened to use it on her husband. He looked up and met her twinkling eyes, and started laughing harder.

"It's not a spell to use lightly. Without the numbing charm it is quite painful. It can even be applied to a surface, and left in place for the unwary. I would doubt that you'll ever have occasion to use it, but then again you never know." She trailed off wickedly.

Harry couldn't help it. He fell off his chair because he was laughing too hard.

Chapter 45 Christmas '93 Part 2

Cassandra smiled as Harry activated the Portkey that was taking him to France. She honestly believed that this was the right choice for Harry this year. He had been so wound up with his aunt this summer, and then the current tensions with the trustees, his getting away from it all was precisely what he needed. She really hoped he had a good time and she couldn't wait to hear what all he'd learned when he got back.

The week that Harry had made the change in his plans she had sent an owl to Black letting him know that his appointment with Harry would be changed from the first of the holiday to the end. He had responded by asking if they could meet instead. She had thought about it for days before finally agreeing. Her plans for the holidays included the solstice dinner at the Davies and the Longbottom ball but most of her time would be her own unlike the previous year where she had been keeping an eye on Harry.

The next day she waited in a private parlor at the Leaky Cauldron. Precisely at ten the door opened and Sirius Black came in.

"Lord Black?"

"Sirius, please. You say "Lord Black", and I want to look around for my father. Miss Yaxley, thank you for seeing me. Um, I know you work for my godson but I'm not really sure what all that entails, not that that is really any of my business really, but...I guess I'll be blunt. I screwed up with Harry, and right now as you probably already know he doesn't want anything to do with me. Part of me can't really blame him, because where he is concerned I've made one screw-up after another, I wouldn't want anything to do with someone like me either. But I really want another chance and I'm willing to do whatever it takes to get that chance. I'm hoping that you'll be able to tell me what that will take."

"I'm not sure. Harry hasn't exactly been raised to be the most trusting or forgiving person. Why should I help you?"

"Because despite my screw-ups, and what I said when I first saw Harry after I got out of Azkaban, I love Harry and I only want good things for him. I want to help him grow into the type of person James and Lily would be proud of."

"And what kind of person is that?"

"Someone who is strong, that does good things, that does what is right. Someone who helps others."

"Who, or rather, how do you define: "Good things and what is right"? Because, Mr. Black, while all that sounds very good, since I met Harry at Hogwarts I've seen "good" people do awful things to one of the few people I've ever met, that looks beyond labels and honestly has never tried to hurt someone unless provoked. He can be the sweetest person I've ever known, but he has these mile high walls around his heart. Walls that have been built by people like you. So unless you've got more to offer than pretty words, I think we're done here."

"What does he need? I will do anything, and I do mean anything, to prove I mean what I'm saying."

Cassandra was very tempted to just dismiss what Black was saying, but then she remembered tales her great-granduncle had told of the Black family library that he'd visited when visiting his sister, Lysandra, who had married a Black. "The Black family library, there are certain things Harry has found out that he needs more information on, unfortunately the information isn't readily available at least not through normal channels or even through not so ordinary channels. You let me do research in the Black family library and I'll tell Harry that you're trying to help us. Which will probably buy you enough tolerance that you'll get a shot at making that apology you claim you want to give."

Sirius gulped. The Black family library was a serious matter. Letting this girl and Harry have access was horrifying because it would mean they would have to go into his ancestral abode. The second most horrifying place he had ever dwelled. He looked at her face, she was completely serious. He was going to have to think about this. Could he really face those demons that lived in him from his childhood and go back to that house? "I'll think about it. Thank you for seeing me, Miss Yaxley."

Cassandra finished her tea trying to calm her nerves. She had hidden it throughout the meeting but from the second Sirius Black had walked into the room a small part of her that she had never felt

before had stood up and made itself known. This had the potential to be very bad. She left the parlor and paid the reckoning with Tom, then headed back to her apartment. She had a few things to do before the party at the Davies'.

Sirius apparated back to Remus' place. He'd been staying there since his release from the clinic. He was at a bit of a loss. He sat down and struggled not to get lost in the memories of his childhood. When he'd been a small boy he'd been terrified of his parents, they had told him the Black heir was expected to excel at everything he attempted, and he'd tried. His efforts however always fell short of his parents' expectations, they were never good enough. Their punishments had always been more mental than physical. Shunning him when he was little, verbally abusing him when he reached double digits. He had chosen to act as if it didn't affect him, boldly doing as he wished. The Sorting Hat had called him brave for continuing to try despite his belief that his life was a hopeless cause. It told him that his tilting at windmills attitude made him a lion. It told him that in Gryffindor he would find his heart and learn to see what was already there.

He had, and he had found his true family in Gryffindor. As a Black at first he hadn't been welcome, but his cousin James had taken him under his wing and protected him. He had found happiness there, James' parents had learned the truth of his family the summer he was fifteen and Charlus had pulled strings and blackmailed the Blacks into letting him go. He'd gone mad the night he lost James. He'd lost everything that night. It was only through Harry's efforts that he wasn't still in Azkaban.

Now he had to go back to that house, back to where he would once again hear the abuse his mother had heaped on him. It would only be her portrait, but he would hear it all again. He would have to face it, if he wanted another chance with his godson. Paige had told him you'll have to grovel until you find out what he wants and give it to him on a silver platter. Well he hadn't had to grovel much but the size of the task in front of him was of such Herculean proportions he wasn't sure he could do it. It was certainly payback, he had called Harry a coward and now he was being forced to face how much of a coward he himself was.

Three hours later he got up from his chair and floo called the clinic's office. Miss Montgomery, the receiving medi-witch answered, "Mr. Black, is there something you needed?"

"I need to schedule some appointments with Paige this week. I know it's Christmas week, but I need to see her."

"Of course, Mr. Black."

Felicia Corner smiled at yet another of the firm's important clients. Tonight had proven slightly difficult, all because of the presence of Bettina Bagginsley. The woman was an infuriating gossip and was trying to put the worst spin on the fact that Harry had opted not to attend the soiree. Felicia had wound up resorting to name-dropping to still the rumors. Thank Merlin Cassandra was here, and had, when asked, confirmed that Harry wasn't here because he was in France staying with the Flamels.

Privately Felicia wondered if Harry had chosen to go because he was unhappy with his trustees. It wouldn't surprise her. The trustees, with the certainty of age, had overlooked what they knew of Harry, that he was proud but reasonable, thus making a couple of poor decisions in a row as a group. After the debacle of speaking to Petunia, when Felicia had come back with her tail figuratively tucked between her legs, it was jointly decided that they would in the future advise Harry of all his options, offer an opinion if asked, but would let him make his own decisions. They were less likely to give offense that way.

Meanwhile it looked as if they would be doing damage control throughout the holiday.

Neville Longbottom was kind of surprised at how much he missed having his best friend around over Christmas. He was used to laughing as Harry charmed the adults at the ball. He missed the way Harry would say all these little subtly snarky comments that left him torn between amusement and horror, and the way Harry could mimic the worst of society's blowhards and remove the sting from their criticisms; not that he ever did either anywhere but in private with those he trusted.

His Gran had taken it poorly that the Flamels had refused the invitation to the ball. She had muttered several depreciations every

time she was asked the whereabouts of Lord Potter, but only after first chasing the questioner away with a gush of saying how Harry had gotten the marvelous opportunity to study with Nicholas Flamel. Neville hoped Harry was having fun though.

Thankfully his grandmother had invited everyone in the cadre, and all the rest of them came except Hermione Granger who was once again in Switzerland skiing. The ball also had a larger than normal percentage of ministry personnel. Gran couldn't resist bragging about his score on the government exam to everyone and Neville found it a bit embarrassing.

Christmas morning arrived and Neville dove into his presents. He started with Harry's. When Harry had given out his gifts this year, he had had stack of them all the same size and shape and they were told the contents had been charmed unbreakable but they should still be careful. When Neville opened it his breath caught. It was the cadre. All of them caught in in a charcoal and chalk drawing. Somehow Harry had caught everyone and put them together for this drawing and he had spelled it so the figures could move a little, not the full on movement that a normal portraits would have, but enough that he had captured the essence of each person: Aaron's nervous habit of drumming the fingers on his left hand, Tracey's flirtatious wink, Hermione's tendency to never be without a book in hand, and Padma's wary habit of glancing around. Harry had caught them all. Harry was central in the drawing which wasn't a surprise because he was behind the formation of the group. On his right hand side was Neville and on his left was Luna. Hermione and Aaron stood behind them and everyone else stood scattered around them. Neville wondered if Harry had had a reason for putting people where he did or if it had been a subconscious arrangement based on their level of trust with Harry. Neville spent so long looking at the portrait that he didn't get to open all his presents before going to visit his parents. He made a point to bring the portrait with him so he could show his mum. Neville also grabbed Harry's gift to Alice as well as his own before leaving.

Petunia Dursley gave her sister-in-law a smile as Dudley pulled the presents that had arrived last night from Harry from beneath the tree. She first tried to interest Rose in the gift she was unwrapping for her. But Rose was more interested in the ribbon that had been tied around it.

"So where's that nephew of yours again?" Marge rumbled.

"France, he got the opportunity to do a study trip." Petunia answered.

"Don't know that I'd have let the boy go on some foreign study thing, never know what he might bring back."

Vernon decided to derail his sister, she had never liked Harry. She remembered how early on he hadn't been self supporting. "Harry is a sensible lad, and it was a good opportunity."

"Here, Dad, this one is from Harry. Aunt Marge, this one is for you. Mum, this one is yours. And Rose's and mine. Can I go first?"

"Go ahead, son." Vernon said.

Dudley excitedly tore into the package. Inside were two tickets to a boxing match. He felt a slight pang of disappointment. He enjoyed taking his friends with him. But he could tell there was something else in the box so he pulled the tissue back. "Oh wow, a Swiss Army Knife! The guys in cadet force will be jealous."

Marge bit back a disparaging sniff. Dudley was pleased so she wouldn't say anything. She pulled at the wrapping of her own gift. She hated to admit it but that wretched boy who had been such a burden on her brother generally seemed to have a decent sense of what she liked. Marge put it down to the taste drilled into him by Petunia. Finally the wrapping was off, a bottle of sweet wine, some cookies and Swiss chocolates, as usual the gift was appropriate and once again something she would like. Once again she would have to swallow down her complaints about the boy, or she would seem ungrateful.

Vernon was puzzled. He could only think that maybe Harry had sent him a painting he had made. He opened the card.

Uncle Vernon,

I couldn't think of what to get you this year, and I haven't had much opportunity to paint. But while I was in Strasbourg I found this. I thought it interesting, yet restful. So I got it, thinking you could hang it at home, or if you wanted you could switch it out with one of the ones in your office.

Your nephew, Harry

He looked at the canvas. It was indeed a picture that would look well in his office. Years ago when he first got a private office, Petunia had told him that to give a good impression for both clients and his boss he should have a painting on the wall in addition to the photo of his family to make it his. He had followed that advice ever since. Twice over the years his boss had liked the art so much that he had purchased it from Vernon at a profit. He seldom had the same piece up for longer than a quarter but he rotated pictures there with pieces here at home. This one of the Strasbourg Cathedral would be an excellent addition to his collection.

Petunia asked Dudley to open his sister's and they all thought the delicate ornament was exquisite. Dudley took it and hung it on the tree immediately.

Vernon took Rose from Petunia so she could open hers. She unwrapped it wondering what Harry had given her this year.

Dear Aunt Petunia,

I know the star we've used since Dudley and I were little was looking dilapidated the last I saw it, but I somehow doubt you had a chance to replace it since the last two Christmases have been with Marge and this year you've got little Rose to see to. So When I saw this at the market in Strasbourg I thought of you.

Sincerely, Harry

She pulled the tissue paper aside, then gasped. A nine inch blown glass star to top a tree lay in the box. She carefully pulled it out and showed everyone. Then she noticed the box had something else in it yet. "Vernon would you place this on the tree, while I.."

Vernon handed Rose to Marge and carefully took the star tree topper from his wife. Dudley rose from where he sat on the floor to help his father. A few minutes later the old star which had seen better days was replaced by the new one. Petunia pulled the packing aside and found her usual supply of personalized stationary in the bottom of the box. She smiled.

Christmas morning Cassandra had a lie in. When she finally rose at 10:30 a.m, she came out and was surprised to see the Potter elves had apparently been busy. There was a veritable banquet of a Christmas brunch awaiting her under stasis charms: egg nog, mimosa, saffron buns, brioche and scones, crispy bacon, onion tartlets, and mini quiche florentines, and poached pears. She grinned. The elves spoiled her so. She snagged a brioche to nibble while she opened a small pile of presents. She was pleased to have one from her mother, She really wished she could talk to her. She was still puzzled by the fact she had felt such a pull towards Sirius Black and found herself thinking of the man at odd moments.

Both Marcus and Aaron had sent her something: a charmed hat and scarf, and gloves respectively. They must have shopped together because they matched. Her Mother sent her a charmed cloak. Petunia sent her a gift certificate to the hairdressers, that would actually be enough for two haircuts or a permanent. Felicia and the other trustees sent gift certificates to various stores on the Alley. Finally she got to Harry's gift. She first opened the card. In addition to the usually holiday wishes there was a letter.

Cassandra,

Happy Christmas! It is hard to believe another year is gone. But it has, so I wish for you to know just how much I appreciate all you do. To that end know that your account at Gringotts is fifty galleons richer, and that now that my money is making money, I have evaluated my income and my expenses and have decided that in honor of the service which you have provided for me I will pay you commensurate to what I feel your services are worth. As of the beginning of the year your salary will be doubled. The expense account will increase slightly. Because although your research has been invaluable, I want you to find a witch or wizard with shadier connections who can find out even more dirt on Fudge and Dumbledore who is going to be paid to risk themselves. You are too valuable to me! Enjoy the rest of your present; it's in the box. I'll see you on the second.

Affectionately, Harry

She pulled off the wrapping off her actual present and smiled to see a bottle of wine and an assortment of sweet treats, and a gorgeous

blown glass ornament. She felt spoiled as never before, she loved working for Harry.

January second came and with it Harry bid goodbye to Nic and Nell.

"Au revoir, j'avais un temps merveilleux. (Goodbye, I had a marvelous time.)

"Jusqu'à la prochaine fois, peut-être tu pourras visiter en été. (Until next time, perhaps you can visit in the summer.) Nell said.

"Je voudrais que. (I'd like that.)" Harry activated his portkey. After a few minutes going through customs he activated his portkey to Potter Place.

The first thing he saw was Cassandra. She looked at him searchingly.

"Was it a good trip?"

"I think it was the most fun I've ever had. I learned three new spells. My French is much better. I saw a bunch of movies. Nic gave me the next level of book in alchemy to study. I learned a bunch of wandlore, some history too. I should have an easier time finding stuff in the Hogwarts library 'cause Tante Nell taught me the magical equivalent to the Dewey system. Strasbourg was beautiful. The shopping in Paris was amazing. I got about half the fabric for my next wardrobe..." Harry stopped. "What are you smiling about?"

"I don't think I've ever seen you this happy and wound up before. It sounds like you had a wonderful time." Cassandra had to smile, Harry's obvious happiness was infectious. For once he was sounding and acting like a boy his age.

"I did, in fact they've invited me back this summer. I'll have to talk to Aunt Petunia and the trustees to find out what their plans are but I really want to go again. Do you think they'll let me?"

"I don't know, but probably. How was your Christmas?"

"Great. Thanks for the pen. I like that it links to a bottle and it came with the spell to link it to a new one when that one's empty."

"Well, it wasn't hard. I bought the pen in Mayfair and then sent it to Scrivenshaft's for spelling. The proprietor asked if he could get some more and sell them using you as advertising. I was thinking we could conceivably see about buying pens like that and supply them to him at a reasonable markup."

"In other words maybe supply him with pens from the muggle world and make some money. While you're at it you could sell him paper and ring binders." He teased knowing that those had been her favorite office supplies from the muggle world.

"That's not a bad idea, paper is less expensive than parchment. And I know it's what you use for note-taking in class and the rough drafts of your essays."

Harry chuckled. "If you want to deal with the headaches of setting up such a business, I'll front you the money for a one time setup and sign a letter of endorsement in exchange for a quarter of the net profit but I don't want to do any of the work involved."

Cassandra looked thoughtful. "I'll think about it. Now, not to bring you down, but tomorrow I've made arrangements for us to have breakfast with your godfather. It will be here. In addition to me, I thought we could ask the elves if they could bring a couple portraits from the Manse."

Harry lost his smile at her words. "I really don't want to see him."

"I know, but he promised to do anything to get another chance and you did agree to meet with him over the break. I told him we want access to the Black family library. I think that library is our best bet to find the information we want as long as Dumbledore is keeping us from Slytherin's library. Besides, I honestly believe that he'll be better this time, Harry." As Cassandra said this, she thought: "and if he's not I'll kill him." "Is there anything you need in London? If so we can get it today."

"Just some art stuff."

A few hours of shopping in London for art supplies had Harry more cheerful again and Cassandra really hoped Black didn't put his foot in his mouth again.

The next morning Cassandra met Sirius Black and to her surprise Remus Lupin outside the building that housed Potter Place. She was glad that the elves had brought both of Harry's great-grandparents' portraits and the first Baron Potter into the morning room.

"Follow me." They went into the lift and she used the key that allowed her access to the penthouse.

In the lift, Sirius did the gentlemanly thing and introduced Remus Lupin. "Miss Yaxley, may I introduce Remus Lupin. Remus, this is Miss Cassandra Yaxley. She works for Harry."

"So I gathered, your nervousness is showing, Pads. Miss Yaxley, a pleasure."

Cassandra extended her hand. "For me as well. Harry says you're the best defense teacher he's had yet at Hogwarts."

"Can I ask what the plan for this is?" Sirius asked.

"The elves will be serving a brunch while you talk with Harry. I hope I don't need to instruct you not to mention Albus Dumbledore."

Sirius spoke up. "Ah, no, Remus has given chapter and verse about how Harry despises him."

"Good." At that moment the lift doors dinged and opened. Cassandra led the way to the morning room.

Harry stood next to the portrait of the first Baron when the doors to the room opened. He was surprised to see Remus as well as Black. He wasn't sure how he felt about the second man's presence. That letter has stung. But he was Baron Potter now so he would act like it. He took a deep breath to steady himself, then moved forward. "Remus, this is a surprise. Mr. Black, welcome to Potter Place."

"Thank you, Harry." Remus said.

Sirius stumbled forward, and said, "I want to thank you, too. I was out of line the last time we met. I deserve the scorn you have for me because all I've done where you're concerned is screw up. I appreciate this chance to start again."

Harry nodded stiffly, then gestured towards the table, "Gentlemen, lady, shall we?" He pulled Cassandra's seat out for her and then scooted her into place.

Libby took that as the cue for the elves to serve. Fruit compote topped with a dollop of whipped crème, a soft boiled egg, a thick slice of ham, a small chunk of gouda and five ebelskivers topped with syrup appeared at each place. Tea also appeared and Cassandra poured.

They ate in almost silence. Cassandra asked Harry, "Do you want two of my ebelskivers? I don't usually eat this much for breakfast."

Harry in true teenage boy fashion happily accepted. He finished not only his plate but he also asked Libby for seconds on the fruit.

Sirius and Remus both found themselves smirking a little. They knew that Lily would be proud of the table manners Harry had displayed. Heaven knew when they had been boys their own manners weren't that good. Now that breakfast was finished it was time to talk.

After most of two weeks Sirius had come partly to terms with the request for access to the Black Library but he needed to know why. "Harry, um... I know that you and Cassandra want access to the Black Library, and I'm willing. But first I need to know why."

Harry leaned back, looked consideringly at his godfather, then answered. "How much do the two of you know about why my parents went into hiding?"

"Not much, the Headmaster said his source reported that the Potters and the Longbottoms were being targeted and that they should go into hiding. Frank and Alice moved from their flat in London to a cottage on the Longbottom Estate. Frank and Augusta weren't seeing eye to eye about his involvement with the Order, which was why he chose a cottage on the estate rather than the main house. He figured the family wards there would be enough. I guess he forgot that the ones on the main house would have protected him against almost anything, but the ones on the cottage weren't that strong.

"Anyway the Manse was ruined and none of the Potter Properties was that strong, so James and Lily chose the cottage in Godric's Hollow. They put it under fidelius, but they chose Peter, and he betrayed them. But I don't know what prompted them to go into hiding in the first place." Sirius answered.

"Nor do I." Remus seconded.

"Dumbledore didn't tell anyone?" Harry asked.

"Tell us what?" Remus asked

"Huh. Well, I suppose I can sort of understand why he wouldn't say anything then, but now..." Harry sighed. "Lord Voldemort isn't quite as dead as is currently believed. I know this because of what happened to me first year. About fourteen years ago, Dumbledore was given a prophecy. It said,*THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD APPROACHES...BORN TO THOSE WHO HAD THRICE DEFIED HIM, BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES...AND THE DARK LORD WILL MARK HIM AS HIS EQUAL, BUT HE WILL HAVE A POWER THE DARK LORD KNOWS NOT...AND EITHER MUST DIE AT THE HAND OF THE OTHER FOR NEITHER CAN LIVE WHILE THE OTHER SURVIVES... THE ONE WITH THE POWER TO VANQUISH THE DARK LORD WILL BE BORN AS THE SEVENTH MONTH DIES...*"

Remus and Sirius sat in shock.

Harry continued to speak. "I don't believe in prophecy but I think given he came after me as a baby and his followers after the Longbottoms, Voldemort does. Which kind of leaves me in a position of being bound by the prophecy. Which means I will be fighting Voldemort again because he is still around, and I very much doubt he'll be anymore inclined to leave me alone now than he was then.

"I'm between a rock and a hard place. He's got years of experience, a horde of knowledge I don't have, and a drive to end me, not to mention all of his pesky followers. And I have an old manipulator who wants me ignorant for God knows what reason.

"Gentlemen I have a burning desire to survive both my dark lord and my manipulator. Which means I plan on making my own rules."

Remus spoke up, "Why do you call Albus, your manipulator?"

Chapter 46 The Manipulations of Albus Dumbledore

Harry gave himself a mental kick, it was rare that his mouth ran a head of his brain, but apparently the stress he felt with regard to today's meeting was just what it took. He thought for a second how could he make this work for him. A moment later he nodded to himself.

"Tell me did either of you read the back issues of The Daily Prophet from the summer of 1992?"

He waited and both men shook their heads no.

"Did the Headmaster ever share with his Order his rationale, or his method for placing me in my aunt's home?"

Sirius spoke up, "If he did, I never heard, because I was hauled away to Azkaban."

"Yes... and without a trial. I have yet to decide if that was merely gross negligence, or if it was an intentional move to keep you from influencing me." Harry cocked an eyebrow at Remus.

"He said something about blood wards from your mother's sacrifice. But he was never willing to answer questions. He just said you were fine, that you were protected. That was what mattered most your safety."

"Yes, my safety... How safe would you consider it to leave a toddler on a doorstep on a November night? I realize he probably set some charms on me designed to keep me warm, and children are notoriously sound sleepers. But in general how safe would you consider that to be?"

Both men looked astonished and appalled, but didn't answer.

"Were you aware that he didn't even have the decency to tell my aunt her sister was dead in person, that he didn't even bother to ask if she was willing to raise me?"

Sirius looked appalled. Remus looked extremely uncomfortable.

"To add insult to injury, he trapped us there with his wards. The year they had intended to move to a larger house he came. He had cancelled the movers, the day they were supposed to come. He placed compulsion spells so my uncle doesn't want to move away from Privet Drive even if it means he advances more slowly at work.

"Without asking he decided to limit their family. His wards meant they couldn't enlarge their family via normal means, since the day he put them up my aunt was unable to have more children. What gave him the right to make that decision for them?

"As for watching over me, he came to see me exactly twice. The day he cancelled the move and the day I did my largest piece of accidental magic. Both times he tried to oblivate me, but I remembered anyway. He had Mrs. Figg who lived two blocks over coming by to spy. When I was little she was just the creepy weird lady that babysat sometimes, but later I realized she was more than just a little weird. It was more like she had very little clue about normal people, and for some reason she was interested in me and my family.

"He told people I was treated like a prince. What prince does chores to earn his keep, wears second-hand clothes and does odd jobs around the neighborhood for pocket money? Maybe if he had seen to it my aunt and uncle got the stipend they were supposed to it might have been true, but he didn't.

"He let people blow up the events of that Halloween into this whole sick sort of mythology like I'm this destined hero, the Boy-Who-Lived. Glorious destinies result in grand funerals, and I have no desire to be a martyr for the sheeple I've met in the wizarding world. I may be the one to kill Voldemort in the long run. I don't know. But if I do, it will be because I won't roll over and die on anyone's say so. Which at the rate the Headmaster is "training" me is about all I'd be fit for.

"And that is completely ignoring the fact he bound my magic and never checked on me afterwards."

At this Harry's great-grandparents spoke up from their portrait. "It is nothing short of miraculous that Harry's magic didn't break the way Charlus' did."

Harry began again. "Did you know in the letter to my aunt he said don't tell me about the magical world because it would place too many burdens on me? To which I say: thank God Aunt Petunia raised me the way she did. If she hadn't I would be even further behind the eight ball on the whole be prepared for the life I'm expected to lead than I already am.

"When I was really little my uncle resented my very presence because I was a drain on their resources, what if they had been abusive? I mean the beat you, starve you, won't spend a penny sort of abusive. Would Dumbledore have stepped in? I doubt it. I think that man wanted me downtrodden and believing I shouldn't question him. That I should be enthralled by magic, rather than seeing it for the tool it is. Why else leave me in ignorance? And before you tell me he didn't, I want you to think about something. McGonagall does all the contacts for the muggleborn. Now, while I'm not muggleborn, the amount my aunt could teach me about the magical world could be written on the head of a pin. So why was it that my guide into the magical world was Hagrid?"

Harry glanced at the first Baron. He was smiling and nodding in approval. So Harry continued, "Don't get me wrong. I like Hagrid. I think he's a nice person. But the man is thicker than a tree trunk in the Forbidden Forest, and he believes exactly what Dumbledore tells him to."

"On my first visit to Diagon Alley there was no plan for me to find out anything from the goblins about my accounts. Hagrid was to take me to the bank, help me get just enough money for the basics, and then to hustle me through my shopping so I couldn't find out much. Unfortunately for Dumbledore I was raised to question things, knew enough to know what questions to ask, and my aunt came along with me. Between the two of us, I suspect I learned way more than the Headmaster intended, and my aunt and I took steps to remove his control of me."

"That is just his questionable actions towards me before I started at Hogwarts. Next, I want you to think of his actions towards the magical world. He holds two of the four most influential posts in the magical world. He used to hold three, but what has he done with them?

"He claims to want equality between the races. However under his tenure as Chief Warlock more anti-creature legislation was passed than in the two hundred years prior."

"But he allowed me to come to Hogwarts!" Remus protested.

"Yes , and how many werewolves have attended since? And it's not like you haven't been properly grateful to him ever since. After all, he told you that it would be less confusing for me if you had no contact with me while I was growing up at my aunt and uncle's. Didn't he? And what did you do? Precisely as he told you to.

"He claims to want greater equality between muggleborns and purebloods. From what I can tell with the exception of the auror department where there are a token three muggleborn, there isn't a single muggleborn in the ministry who is above a simple clerical worker or janitor. And even there, they are outnumbered twenty to one. Not one member of the Wizengamot is muggleborn, and although the Muggle Protection Act was passed, it is nothing but a good intentioned and poor attempt at protecting muggles. But nothing substantial has been done to help equalize wizarding society. Purebloods have more rights and power than halfbloods and muggleborn.

"As Chief Warlock one of his duties was to see that proper trials occur. I know of at least two instances where they have not. There are probably a dozen more I'm not aware of yet. You, Mr. Black, surely as a member of Dumbledore's order, you should have had a trial. Lucius Malfoy is the other. The evidence that he somehow bribed his way out of his trial at the end of the last war is overwhelming. Which makes me question what did Dumbledore have to gain, or was it lose?

"I don't know enough of international magical politics to speak on his performance as Supreme Mugwhump. I do know that Magical Great Britain is fairly isolated and Diagon Alley strikes me as being less prosperous, having a predominance of British goods, unlike Rue de Magie in Paris which has a larger variety.

"Then there's Hogwarts..." Harry sighed. He wanted to convince these men that Dumbledore was a dangerous man to trust, but what to say?

"My first year at Hogwarts...I heard how he wanted unity between the houses. Like that would happen with the level of prejudice his policies encourage. Then there's the fact the Gryffindors are allowed to get away with anything short of murder, and Snape is allowed to get away with retaliatory point taking. There's the fact that I was effectively ostracized by almost the entire school for the first half of the year. I was relentlessly pranked by a pair of Gryffindors and not one punishment was given to them, but when I got sick of it and pranked them back I was given detention.

"And there's how much grief Neville was given for daring to be friends with a Slytherin. McGonagall, herself, told me that I should distance myself from Neville to protect him, one time while he was in the infirmary. Because some older boys had beaten him up and thrown him down the stairs to the dungeons for daring to be friends with me.

"Then there's his claims that Hogwarts is the safest place in the magical world. In my first year in addition to being mercilessly pranked for more than half the year, I encountered and fought a troll, I was nearly redacted at point blank range by a dorm mate. Although to be fair, I did half provoke Malfoy into it and he was punished for it. There was the detention into the Forbidden Forest where we were looking for what was killing unicorns.

"Then there was the "philosopher's stone" that Dumbledore brought into the school to "protect" it. How safe can a school be when at the opening feast the students are given a warning: "don't go near the third floor corridor on potential pain of death".

"That also leaves out the Voldemort possessed Defense professor. He at the end of the year kidnapped Neville to force me through the gauntlet of protections Dumbledore put in place to protect the "stone". Mind you it was a gauntlet designed to test the abilities of a first year. A cerebus, devil's snare, a flock of charmed keys, McGonagall's giant chess set, a troll, a potion/logic challenge and finally a charmed mirror. The last was probably the only one that truly would have offered a challenge to any good adult wizard. I managed to get the stone, get Neville away from Quirrellmort, and escape. The teachers took two hundred points from Slytherin for doing so.

"The ironic side of it all was the "stone" wasn't even real and I already knew that. Having figured out what was in the castle, written to Uncle Nic, and found out it was a decoy."

"As a Headmaster his job is to make the school safe and fair environment, make sure we have competent teachers , and to provide a moral guidance; that as far as I am concerned he's not qualified to give.

"Well, let's examine that shall we? Safety? Nope can't check that one. Faced death three, no sorry four times, first year alone. That's assuming you count the gauntlet I ran as one attempt. Then second year there was a diary that possessed a girl in Gryffindor and her setting a basilisk loose on the school. It wasn't the teachers that figured out that one; it was a group of students. Third year has actually been quiet. I keep waiting for a shoe to drop.

"Good teachers? That one is probably half a check. Transfiguration, the teacher is a prejudiced old biddy, but she knows her subject and teaches it well. Charms is good. Potions, bzz, can't give him a pass on that one. Snape knows his potions but his own prejudice and bitterness makes him an awful teacher and he has little ability to teach what he knows to others. Astronomy, I suppose if you know nothing she's not horrible, but I have yet to learn a damn thing in her class. Muggles not only know the subject better; they teach it better, too. Runes is fabulous. Arithmancy is dry but good. History, bzz, between a text that is one-sided, and a ghost who puts students to sleep that's a clear fail. Given that that's been the case since Dumbledore became Headmaster it's not a wonder the wizarding world is in trouble. Most the citizens know nothing of history, or their own government. Herbology is good. Care of Magical Creatures, Hagrid knows his subject but has no sense, and thinks that teaching the large dangerous creatures first is the best way to pass on his love of creatures to the students. Never mind he just terrifies them instead. Muggles Studies, give me a break. The pureblood that teaches it would be picked up as a lunatic if she spent a day in the muggle world, and the texts are fifty years out of date. Divination is a joke. I hear the professor is fond of making pronouncements of death, none of which have ever come true. And last of course, is Defense which is thought to be cursed. Remus, you are the only truly competent professor I've had and how long did you last? My first professor was possessed by Voldemort. My second was a pedophile. My third was a werewolf. No offense, Remus. This year's

is mostly competent, but he doesn't give much practical. It's more here are the creatures based on book drawings, here's the defense, no practical attempts allowed; moving on. I've learned more from a couple of my housemates than from the defense teachers.

"The Headmaster providing a moral compass? I had to ask several times to get my own property back from him. He completely failed at fulfilling my parents' wishes. Prejudice, bigotry, bullying run rampant in the school, check. Leonardo DaVinci said, Not to punish evil is the same as authorizing it. I think the Headmaster lets students hurt and humiliate each other enough that it's the same as authorizing it. Yep, I do believe that is a failing mark.

"Dumbledore's biggest claims to fame are Voldie is supposedly afraid of him and he defeated Grindelwald. Dumbledore is regarded as Leader of the Light and I'm not saying, although it probably sounds as if I am, that he's a terrible person. I just have seen enough of him that I don't have a reason to trust him and I have several reasons not to. Not the least of which is he's surrounded himself with sycophants and he's been listening to them long enough that he thinks he's God's gift and infallible. He's human. He can and probably does make mistakes.

"One last food for thought, I have heard Dumbledore say, "It's for the greater good." That slogan was also used by Grindelwald in his rise to power. It is a poor excuse used by men who do awful things in the name of progress. Frequently such men believe themselves above the law and look the other way, not accepting that they are responsible. Claiming that evil worked in the name of good isn't evil merely good in another guise. A wise man named Norman Mac Donald once said, Do not imagine that the good you intend will balance the evil you perform. In my opinion Albus Dumbledore, at best, can be described as a benign dictator, either that or a senile incompetent with delusions of grandeur.

"I am of the opinion that evil worked in the name of good is still evil, justifiable, maybe, but I would never stoop to trying to call an evil act anything but what it is. I do believe that there are such things as necessary evils. I wouldn't want to commit one, unless I was completely sure there wasn't another alternative or that that alternative wouldn't wind up costing an innocent far more than they should be asked to pay. I would only take volunteers, and I certainly

wouldn't try to put a child unknowingly in the line of fire. I'm quite sure Dumbledore doesn't follow even that much of a moral code.

"I want Cassandra to have access to the Black library. I believe Voldemort's attack resulted in my becoming a magical heir of Slytherin by right of conquest. I need to learn and understand those magics. If the prophecy is correct and I am the only one who can defeat Voldemort. I need to know how he survived in the first place. I need to be able to recognize and counter dark spells he or his followers may throw at me. I can't learn that from a "light" library.. I turn the other cheek to a point, but I refuse to be a carpet for people who want to hurt me or my friends. I am not above hurting others if it means I can protect those I care about. The Black library should have at least some of the information that can help me achieve these goals."

Remus felt like he could be knocked over with a feather. He had always believed and trusted the Headmaster since he allowed Remus to attend Hogwarts. But as Remus looked at things from Harry's perspective it was clear that the Headmaster's actions and motives were highly suspect. He wasn't sure what to believe.

Sirius felt sick. He had believed that Dumbledore was a good man. That he was not responsible for what had happened to Sirius. But seeing things from Harry's point of view made it hard not to see that Dumbledore really wasn't as light as Sirius and the wizarding public had always believed. What kind of person dumped a child on a doorstep with only a letter for an explanation? What kind of person lied about such things?

When Sirius was honest with himself, he didn't really care how taking Harry in affected the Dursleys. They were muggles, but it was pretty obvious that Harry did care, and Harry didn't like the way Dumbledore had presumed that Petunia was willing to care for him. Sirius half wondered if that meant Harry had been raised the way he had been. He hoped not.

Sirius' years at Azkaban had been spent reliving the worst of the years with his mother and father. If he hadn't been able to focus on the thought of his innocence he'd have gone quite mad. As it was, Paige had determined that he would probably have fits of depression for the rest of his life and he had effectively regressed maturity-wise to somewhere around age fifteen. He had decided

after the time that Harry had initially paid for was up, that he would be continuing to see Paige because he could see the benefit of working with her. She challenged him to see life as it was rather than the pre-conceived morass that he'd started from. He was no longer an inpatient at the clinic, but he still had therapy three times a week. Paige made time for him if he needed more, like she had the last week and a half.

He figured it would take a couple years but that maybe when his therapy was done he would have a solid set of values from which to live from and the maturity to face life hopefully making fewer mistakes. His fifteenth year was not one of the more stellar years of his life in terms of decisions he'd made. Right now with his reactions to many things being immature ones, fraught with the likelihood of poor decisions, prejudices stemming from his childhood popping up daily, and frequent overreactions he was relying on Moony's judgement more than his own. He just prayed that he didn't screw up with Harry again.

Sirius thought about the prophecy. How that must have horrified James and Lily. If Harry was indeed the one to end Voldemort he needed training, highly specialized training. Not the standard Hogwarts student training it seemed he'd been getting, especially considering the curse on the defense job. Sirius thought hard about who he could possibly influence into helping Harry. Nymph, of course, but as an auror trainee she'd be hard-pressed to find the time. Remus was a given, he'd do it for his pack even if Dumbledore told him not to. Sirius would have to think about it more.

Cassandra spoke up for the first time. "Harry doesn't want to learn to do dark spells. He just wants to be able to recognize and counter them. We've come up with a way that we feel makes sense. I am effectively a squib, I can work magic but I usually can't do the more difficult magics and I usually find it easier and faster to do something by hand. I will study the books and summarize the incantation the wand movement, and the effects so Harry can recognize it. I will give him everything he needs to know for the counters; this way no sensible person can claim that Harry's going dark.

"I believe that Harry needs this information. I can only help him so much, with my magic being what it is. When he gave me a job he saved me; I'm just trying to return the favor. Letting me do this

research is what the muggles call a win-win situation. Please?" She looked at Sirius with a plea in her eyes.

As Sirius looked in her eyes he felt as if his heart turned over. It scared him. "Alright, you can have access. It may take a month or two. My ancestral abode is something of a disaster at the moment. The old adage the elves reflect the master is sadly remarkably true. Kreator still hasn't pulled himself together since I got out, and being without a family for six years...well. Let's just say his worst traits got magnified, and I'm still debating giving him clothes."

"The Potter elves would probably be willing to help. They don't really have enough to do with me being at school most of the time." Harry said. "And if you want to redo the place, Cassandra probably has a list of contacts that can help. She oversaw the rebuild on Potter Manse. It's fabulous now."

"Are you serious?"

Harry said deadpan, "No, you are."

Remus looked at them and cracked up. Seeing Sirius' favorite pun turned back on him was just too funny, especially coming from the all too serious Slytherin student.

Sirius looked at his godson. Harry looked less uptight than when they had first arrived. "I'd appreciate that." He said, for once ignoring the pun. "I want to help you, Harry. You didn't make this situation, us, adults did, and you shouldn't be expected to fix it. Although magic being what it is, I suspect you will have to deal with the problem. I will try my hardest not to let you down again and to help you."

Harry looked searchingly at his godfather. His instincts said the man was speaking the truth as he knew it. Harry's own experiences though made it difficult for him to trust. "I believe you'll try."

Sirius gave Harry a hopeful grin, "So, godson of mine, what do you like to do?"

Chapter 47

Harry's return to Hogwarts for winter term was uneventful. When the first Hogsmeade weekend of term came around Harry cornered Daphne.

"Hey, Daphne, Hogsmeade this weekend."

"I know."

"Would you go with me? As my date?"

Daphne bit her lip. "Harry, umm... You're a good friend and all, but you're not my type. Besides I'm technically committed elsewhere already."

"You are? But you're only thirteen, and I haven't seen you with anyone."

"I've been betrothed since I was nine."

"To whom?"

"To Giles de Vereignes, he goes to Beauxbatons."

"Why?"

"Part of it is business between our families the rest is our magic showed us to be compatible when I was four and Giles was seven. It's why I know French, Giles is his father's heir and it's a good match. He'll be a Vicomte one day."

"I see."

"I'm sorry, Harry."

"It's okay. After the last couple times I sorta guessed."

"Still friends?"

"Yeah. We're still friends." Harry reflected that while it stung a little, it was fine. There were other girls at Hogwarts after all. He nearly grimaced when a face surrounded by blonde hair with silver gray

eyes flashed through his mind. He would not go there; besides she was only a second year. "Guess I'll go."

He went to the library. He might as well study. He wanted to impress Uncle Nic by being able to discuss intelligently the book on intermediate alchemy the next time he wrote the Flamel's. The beginner book had discussed what alchemy was and covered alchemical processes focusing on combining chemistry and magic. This one focused on arrays; the means by which magicals could alter and control chemical reactions. Harry was finding both his arithmancy and Runes classes very helpful in understanding what he was reading in the book.

That weekend Neville asked him to escort Susan Bones to Hogsmeade, as it was the only way for Neville to persuade Hannah Abbott to go with him. Not wanting to let his best friend down Harry went, and he and Susan had a good time gently teasing Neville and Hannah.

The months went by and Harry was pleased by the fact that the cadre were doing well. He was surprised that his roommate Draco had disciplined himself to the point of actually competing grade wise with the midlevel cadre members. Then the spring quidditch season arrived.

Harry invited Sirius and Remus to the Ravenclaw versus Slytherin game. He still didn't trust either man fully, but Cassandra was starting to work her way through the Black library which proved to him his godfather was at least trying.

The day of the game came and Harry went down to the pitch. He was confident that Slytherin would carry the day. The Claws as a rule didn't do very well with the highly physical game the Slytherins liked to play. Harry had watched the Ravenclaw seeker play against Hufflepuff's last autumn and she had been marking Diggory rather than search for the snitch on her own. Which meant unless she were very lucky he would have no problem beating Chang to the snitch. He calmly listened as Marcus got the rest of the team excited for the game. They went out on the pitch and Harry felt the familiar leap of his spirit as he took to the air.

Up in the stands Albus Dumbledore sat with many of the school governors, a few parents and to his surprise Remus Lupin and Sirius Black as well as the teachers.

Half an hour into the game Severus Snape couldn't resist poking at Black and Lupin. "So why are you here, Black?"

"We're here to watch my godson."

"Yes, young Mr. Potter is an outstanding player. It must rub you raw that he's in my House."

Sirius opened his mouth as if to say something, but then closed it again.

From a few seats over Perseus Davies spoke up. "It's hard for me to watch as well, Potion Master. Young Lord Potter would be an asset in any house. Instead of being in the house that reflects the level of his intelligence, and helping them win, I'll have to watch as my nominal ward's team beats my son's."

Albus spoke up, "I'm curious, why do you imply Harry could fit in any house?"

Perseus snorted. "Haven't you observed him? I would have thought with your level of interest in the boy, Headmaster, you would know that Harry has measurable traits that could place him in any of the houses. He works as hard or harder than a Hufflepuff and is loyal to those he trusts. He passed his Government test on the first try which implies a very high intelligence. He isn't afraid to confront others and is brave enough to stand up to injustice." As he said this he looked Sirius in the eyes. "But through it all he uses instinctive cunning, and always keeps his eye on the prize. Which if I'm not mistaken, he's going for now."

Their attention snapped back to the game. Sure enough Harry was about a foot ahead of Cho Chang as they raced to catch the snitch. Seconds later Harry snagged the snitch and Sirius and Remus found themselves doing what they never would have imagined doing when they were younger, cheering for the snakes.

After taking a victory lap the Slytherins landed for handshakes. Harry and Roger razed each other for a moment, but it was done in

fun. Harry was about to take Cho Chang's hand when she suddenly tripped and fell into him. He staggered back a couple steps and managed to prevent both of them from falling but it ended with Cho Chang basically plastered against his chest and his hand on her derriere. Harry fought back a groan as his body reacted, there was no question in his mind that Cho Chang had an outstanding body.

"Sorry," he said, as he moved his hand away from her bottom while trying to help her get her feet under her.

"Thanks for catching me." She said blushing hotly in embarrassment. "Congratulations on the catch."

"Thanks." Harry half wondered which catch she was talking about. He looked at Chang, he'd been wondering for a while what girl he should pursue next. Although he and Susan Bones had gone out a few times mostly double dates with Neville and Hannah, there was nothing there except friendship. Now it felt as if he'd found his answer.

A few minutes later he joined Roger and Draco as they went to greet the game's guests.

Lucius Malfoy greeted his son and heir with a stiffness and formality that Harry associated with himself and his uncle. Harry felt a pang of sympathy for his roommate, to have that sort of relationship with your own father had to suck. Roger had it better. His father greeted him with a hug and "a better luck next time."

Suddenly Harry was facing his godfather and Remus Lupin. "Professor, Godfather."

"I haven't been your professor for almost a year, Harry. Call me Remus, or if you prefer Moony. It's what you called me when you were little."

"Great catch, Bambi."

Harry said. "Dad called me that, too."

"It's because..." Sirius was suddenly struck by how little he knew his godson and how little Harry knew them. Overwhelming feelings of regret and failure cascaded through Sirius. Part of him wanted to go

floo call Paige so she could guide him through the sudden morass of feelings. He swallowed hard and tried again. "It's because your father was a stag animagus."

"Yes, I know. I've got Dad and Mum's journals. "

Remus could tell that Sirius was still a bit overwhelmed so he stepped up to carry the conversation. "You're an excellent seeker, Harry. I missed your two games last year, although I did see you practice. You got on the team last year, right?"

"Yes I joined last year. Marcus and the rest of the guys taught me about quidditch and the finer points of flying first year, I got my Nimbus and joined the team my second year."

"James would be proud. He was an excellent quidditch player himself. He was a chaser for Gryffindor from second year on. If not for the war he probably would have gone pro." Remus informed Harry.

"Interesting." Harry figured that was a better answer than 'that's nice.'

"If you'd like we got permission for a trip to Hogsmeade, we could go to the Three Broomsticks for butterbeer." Sirius said. He noticed that Harry didn't seem enthused about that idea so he said, "or we could just walk around the castle. Remus said that you're very good at defense, that you came to him for extra lessons. You said that you like art, quidditch, and kendo, but I have no idea what the last one is."

"I'll tell you in a bit. How about you let me go get cleaned up and changed, then I'll meet up with you and we can talk. Fifteen minutes outside the pitch?" After they nodded Harry headed to the locker room. He would miss the Slytherin party but it would be worth it. He had a plan and hopefully he could persuade his godfather and honorary uncle into it.

"YOU WANT ME TO WHAT?" Remus yelled.

"I'm impressed, Bambi. I don't think your father and I ever got Remus that worked up."

Harry looked around to see if anyone was in earshot. He saw no one and he thought they were far enough away from the greenhouses that no one in them would hear. "Look, I know as a werewolf it's hard for you to find a job. I'm offering you a job and a place to live. The pay isn't great, but it helps me. In exchange you dig deeper into persons of interest so I can get leverage. I'd have Cassandra do it but she doesn't have enough magic to defend herself well or to cover her tracks. I'm not asking you to break any laws. But some of the people you'll be investigating have, which means they're dangerous. You can take time off around the full moon without me getting upset about it. It's a win-win. You'll have a job and I'll have someone I can trust looking into things. Besides, unlike when Cassandra started the files and was doing everyone on our list, you'll just be working on keeping tabs on a dozen people. You'll even have a moderate expense account that will let you hire your own informants. When you do, just keep my name out of it."

"Why?"

"Good question, Moony." Sirius said.

"I am doing this because: A) I'm a kid. B) The headmaster has been setting me up to be a proxy hero or a martyr, I'm not sure which, for the magical world. C) I have a psycho after me with his own army of deviants many of whom have influence of their own. Not to mention their desire for revenge that I messed up his original plans. D) Information is a sort of power. If I get D, despite being A, maybe I'll survive B and C."

"What makes you think that you need to do this?"

"My whole childhood. First year. Second year. Take your pick."

Sirius thought about the words Persues Davies had said during the game. It seemed Harry did indeed have his eyes on a prize. Unlike most Slytherins who would want information so they could blackmail and backstab their way to the top, Harry said he was doing this because he wanted to survive.

"Harry, what do you want out of life?"

"I want to be happy, have work to do, people to love, and things to keep my body and mind stimulated. I want the world around me to be a mostly happy, safe and prosperous place."

Sirius and Remus both blinked, that was not the answer either of them expected given the house Harry was in.

"How on earth did you get into Slytherin?" Sirius asked.

"Given who's trying to map out my life for me, how could I not? Besides I told the Hat where to put me and wouldn't accept any other answer, because any other answer gave the Headmaster room to maneuver. I categorically refuse to be his puppet."

He looked at Remus with an earnest look on his face. "So, will you be my investigator?"

Sirius was snickering as they headed to the gates of Hogwarts. Perseus Davies had more of a read on Harry than the man realized. Harry was at least half Hufflepuff, but he also was also at least half every other house because his attitudes and actions combined the best qualities of all the houses even if that meant he was sneaky and conniving. Sirius reflected that he had been way off base calling Harry a coward because the level of sheer guts it took to follow his own plans in the face of everyone else's plans was enormous.

One area that Davies was wrong on though, was on Harry's level of trust. Sirius had grown up in a house where he was tolerated not loved, and he hadn't trusted anyone not even the other marauders not until the end of fifth year. He'd truly started completely trusting James when James had saved Snivellius. He'd trusted him because James had shown he'd do the right thing even if it cost him a lot. James hated Snape more than anyone, but saving him was the right thing to do. James revealing they were animagi could have cost them their wands, but he'd gone straight to Dumbledore and spun it and they'd gotten away with it. Looking back he could see what Harry meant about Gryffindors getting away with way more than they should, but Sirius could also see that Harry was like he had been.

Harry didn't really trust others, or maybe to be more precise Harry didn't trust adults for certain. Sirius wondered what it would take for him to win Harry's trust. He hoped there were people Harry trusted

among his peers. He hated to think that Harry had no one at all he trusted.

Sirius was startled out of his musings at the Hogwarts gates by a flash of startling color.

"Ah, Sirius and Remus, how was your visit with Harry?" Albus Dumbledore stood waiting for them wearing dark peach robes adorned with blue, purple, and silver planets and stars.

Neither of them knew what to say and they stood there a moment dumbfounded.

Albus Dumbledore regretted what he intended to do, but he met Sirius' eyes and scanned. He would have tried to scan Remus but the dual mind of a werewolf was a danger to any legilimens. With Remus there it would only be a cursory scan, there would not be time for more.

"It was fine, Headmaster. It went better than we expected." Remus answered.

Sirius didn't say anything.

Albus' scan showed him that Harry not only didn't trust him, but he was up to something and that he already knew far too much about Albus' maneuvering in his life for Albus' comfort. Now the question was what would he do about it. "That's good, it's important that a boy has adults in his life he can look up to that can put him in touch with his roots." He said. What was he going to do now?

On Monday after classes Harry was surprised to have his compact activate. "Yes, Cassandra, what's up?"

"Jack's here in my office and wants to talk with you."

"Put him on." There was a moments pause before Jack's face appeared. "Hi, Jack, what did you need? Was there a problem with my wardrobe sketches?"

"No, they're great. Once I get measurements and the rest of the materials we're in business for your clothes. The fabrics you sent me are fabulous. I'll be sending you swatches to choose from next week

for the rest. No, what's come up is a friend of mine from design school saw them and the other sketches in the book. She wanted me to ask if she could purchase some of the designs."

"The clothes?"

"No."

Harry thought for a moment of what other sketches were in the sketchbook. "You mean the oriental motif sketches?"

"Exactly, her family has made kimono in Japan for centuries. One of the ways they're trying to keep the art alive is through new variations of classic designs, and she loved your sketches and wants to buy them. Would you be interested?"

Harry didn't think. "Yes. I'm definitely interested."

"Great. The only problem is meeting with her. She's heading back to Japan in four days. She'll want to know your price before she leaves."

"Okay let me think about it overnight and I'll let Cassandra know. She can act as my proxy. Wow. I never expected anything like this."

"Me, neither. But, Harry, you shouldn't doubt your talent. You are a gifted artist. I suspect this is just the first of many commissions you'll get in your life."

"I hope so."

The next morning before classes Harry conversed with Cassandra. "I'm willing to let her have the designs. For every three motifs I want one kimono at cost there are fifteen in the sketchbook. If she thinks that is asking too much, I'm willing to go up to four designs per kimono. I know which ones I want on those kimonos. There's a bamboo, crane and stream that I think would look good on a gray or green background, that would be the first, there's two others one of Hedwig, a plum tree on a rocky outcrop above waves, that one on blue or silver gray, specify Hedwig's colors or they'll make her like a normal phoenix's red and gold. That one is for a man's kimono. The third one is Hedwig, again in her colors, peonies, and clouds. I want that one as an uchikake of light blue. Cassandra, the price she tells

you is likely to be high, but kimono like this are worth thousands. They are works of art. Even at cost they are quite valuable. If I need to pick a fourth let me know, somehow I suspect I'll be lucky to even get three."

"Okay. Are you sure?"

"Yes. I'm positive."

"Alright. I'll talk to you after classes."

Late that afternoon, the cadre was surprised because Harry lacked his usual focus. He was all but vibrating in place until his mirror activated.

Harry didn't bother to greet Cassandra. "What did she say?"

"It will be four designs to every kimono, she thinks her family will go for it but she took pictures of the designs to show them first. She says if they approve, she'll send the contracts the day after she gets home. You and your aunt will need to sign them They'll want fifty percent of the kimono price up front. "

" How many kimonos?"

"The three you wanted. Harry, you realize that the final cost of the kimonos is going to be nearly five thousand galleons?"

"Yeah, but it'll be worth it. You'll see. I've got to go, quidditch practice. Thanks, Cassandra."

"It's what I'm here for. Can I talk to Aaron?"

Harry passed the mirror to Aaron, and waving goodbye to his friends he headed to practice.

Later that evening Severus Snape looked up at the tentative knock on his office door. It was still during his office hours but usually students gave him a heads up before coming to his office, and he'd already seen everyone he was expecting that day. He was shocked at who was standing there. "Come in, what brings you here?"

"My mum's letter to me said you were a legillimens, I've gone as far as I could in my self-study of Occlumency. I need to work with someone. Unfortunately legillimens aren't exactly scattered around on the ground like flowers waiting to be picked in the spring. I will want a unbreakable vow that what you see in my head stays between you and me. Neville Longbottom is willing to be our bonder. I'm willing to match twice your hourly teaching pay. Think about it and let me know."

Chapter 48

Remus felt hesitant about taking the job Harry offered. He really wasn't sure he believed the boy's stories about Albus manipulating the situation. But a job was a job, having a place to live thrown in...well, it was better than his last two jobs. It was almost as good as being a professor. He had met Miss Yaxley outside the building that housed his proposed flat as well as Potter Place.

"So Mr. Lupin, I hope you know your way around the muggle world."

"Mostly. It's always been easier for me to get a job there."

"Good. Here's your keys, the silver colored one is to the building. The lobby is locked before nine a.m. and after nine p.m. Guests have to ring up both during the day and at night, but during the day the building manager is in the office off the lobby. The brass key is to your flat, and the small brass key goes to the elevator that leads to Potter Place. It's the penthouse really, but there's a floo, and a secure office space that you can use. The Potter elves usually keep a small supply of muffins and fruit there in the mornings and bring a lunch in. Dinners you're on your own. Do you want to see the flat?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Follow me then." She led him to to the seventh floor to door 705.
"Here we are."

Remus used the keys she had given him to open the door.

Cassandra wasn't surprised to see the flat was a mirror of her own, right down to bare essential furniture. "Harry said that you can have the day today to get yourself settled, but he hopes you'll be ready to start tomorrow. You'll need to stop by the offices of Corner, Davies, and Ogden for routine paperwork and a confidentiality oath either today or tomorrow, then I'll brief you on your job. Any questions so far?"

"No."

"You seem hesitant, is there some question I can answer?"

"I'm not sure I like the idea of spying on people."

"I don't blame you really. I wasn't too fond of the idea of doing the initial checks myself, but in many respects Harry's right. He's a kid that, based off what happened first year at school, is being maneuvered into things that he knows little about. Most of those manipulations come from high levels in our society. His best chance at a mostly normal and happy life is for him to have information to counter those things. Is it an invasion on the privacy of the people you'll be investigating? Yes, but most of the people you'll be keeping an eye on are people who like to play fast and loose with the rules. Most have definitely broken a few. Harry wants to know what they're up to for his own protection. I think that after a few months you will find yourself in a position of being fine with what you're asked to do, if not you can always quit."

"Somehow I get the feeling you don't approve of me."

"Mr. Lupin, I hardly know you." Cassandra wasn't about to admit he was right. She was glad that she was going to hand off most of the touchier monitoring to a full wizard, but she was more than a little skeptical about this choice of Harry's. This man was a little too in Dumbledore's pockets for her to trust. Plus there was the long list of the ways he had let Harry and Harry's deceased parents down.

Harry had persuaded her to go along with this by pointing out the wisdom in keeping your friends close and your enemies closer. This way he would know what Dumbledore was up to. Harry firmly believed that Mr. Lupin was in Dumbledore's camp. He was confident that he had shaken the man's faith in the Headmaster at least a bit, but was also confident that if push came to shove the werewolf was Dumbledore's man. He believed that habit alone would make that the case, firmly believing that the age and experience difference between himself and the Headmaster would make that the case. Harry had pointed out that the man's presence in Harry's employ would make the Headmaster feel as if perhaps he would be able to exert some influence when he wanted to and the Headmaster wouldn't try to plant a spy that had loyalties Harry wasn't aware of.

Cassandra always got a little nervous when Harry got all sneaky and suspicious like this but she had to admit Harry did generally know what he was doing. Petunia had trained him well, it was a shame she hadn't also managed to instill a true sense of self-worth or a

belief in his being worthy of being loved in the process. Cassandra had figured out that Harry measured his self-worth by how useful he was to others, while at the same time maintaining his independence. To him it was okay to be needed, but not to need others. Harry didn't believe that love was something real at least when it came to him.

She supposed it was the fact that she was his employee that had allowed Harry to allow himself to be as dependent on her as he was. It helped that she was dependent on him as well. She hoped one day Harry's magic would lead him to a person that he would need and he would come to accept that everything didn't have to come from him, that he could take back too without shame. But she knew that day was far in the future.

She shook herself from her musings and back to the moment with Mr. Lupin. "I don't know you, Mr. Lupin. Harry has given you this job and that makes us co-workers. It's not my place to approve or disapprove of Harry's hiring you. It is part of my job to see that you get settled in your flat, that you get the paperwork and oath done at the solicitor's office, and that you're briefed on your job. Nothing more, nothing less."

Remus felt skeptical of Harry's assistant's truthfulness, but decided in the end there wasn't much he could do about it. He followed the directions he was given, reporting for his oath late that afternoon. The oath made him a little nervous because he knew that Albus would at some point ask about Harry. He had already proven that to Remus through past association. He looked at Horace Ogden, "Is that really necessary?"

"It's a standard oath for the employees of our firm. It basically boils down to: what you learn about Harry, his actions, and his interests is private both while he is your employer and after you no longer work for him, stays private. Since Harry is a public figure, we decided it was a good idea for his employees as well. Is there a problem?"

"No, I guess not. When it says all information does it mean all information?"

"It encompasses information that isn't publicly available. It refers to specific information that could only be learned while performing your job. We, Harry's trustees, understand that there are lots of things that you will learn about Harry as you work for him. But if it isn't

something that could be learned through casual observation of him, like say his favorite color, or if you learn it in the course of performing your duties, it is covered by your oath."

"Oh, um, okay I can understand that I guess. I, Remus John Lupin, swear on my magic, to hold private all information about Lord Harry James Potter that I learn in the course of my duties."

"Alright, Thank you for coming in, Mr. Lupin. Cassandra will brief you on your duties in the morning."

The next morning Remus presented himself to Cassandra. She calmly pulled a small stack of files out, said an obscure spell that he recognized as a privacy spell, then Remus' name and then she handed them over.

"These people, your files, are Ministry or Wizengamot personnel. These jackets contain what we already know and are yours to monitor. The three in blue are low priority, I might recommend hiring someone to loosely monitor them or checking if their assistants, friends or co-workers have loose lips. The red files are persons of high interest that have lots of shady connections. Monitor them closely but be careful, they are not nice people. The rest in gray we want to keep a bit more of an eye on but we don't feel they pose a high threat to Harry or his interests.

"Anything you find out gets added to the files." She handed him a thick stack of parchment. "Write up your reports on this. It's pre-spelled by the goblins. Having your flat keys and saying the spell video vidi visum will let you read what is written on it. A monthly summary assuming nothing too interesting is going on will be sufficient. Harry wants a summary of what their activities are. Things like: bills they're proposing in the Wizengamot, who they spend 6 or more hours with in a month not counting their family, if they add a new person to their group of friends, are they living within their means or not, are they indulging in any vices, or doing things out of the norm, that sort of thing."

Remus flipped through the files: Rufus Scrimgeour, Bartiemus Crouch, Delores Umbridge, Amelia Bones, Arthur Weasley, Corneilus Fudge, Marissa Edgecombe, Algernon Croaker, Augustus Rookwood, Pius Thicknesh, Octavian MacMillan, Roman Grandfield, Amos Diggory, Gilbert Wimple, Ludo Bagman, Mafalda Hopkirk,

Walden MacNair, Brodrick Bode, Matthew Perkins, and Arabella Canfield,. "Is it alright if I read what you already know?"

"Of course. Your expense account has a monthly deposit of thirty-five galleons. That is for taking care of meetings with informants i.e . dinners and drinks, it is also for paying informants. I've found if the goal is getting into files in the ministry a sickle or two is usually enough. Schedules for spying on someone usually run more like ten to fifteen sickles, actual information depending on how damaging is a galleon on up. I've never paid more than ten. Of course I've never dug deeply enough to justify spending more than that. Track your expenses. If you run short and I feel it is justified we can discuss upping it." Cassandra nearly snickered at the expression the other man wore. It was so obvious the man was a Gryffindor. It was a good thing he didn't know about Harry's other hire. Harry didn't even really know about his other hire.

When Cassandra had heard Harry's plan to hire full wizards to do his spying she had looked at their lists of people to keep an eye on and realized they desperately needed someone that could travel in Death Eater circles without comment. When thinking about it she realized finding someone was likely to be nearly impossible until she remembered Great Uncle Damian.

The Yaxleys were an oddity in the pureblood crowd. Most purebloods had small families with one to three children. The Yaxleys usually had ten to twelve, of course of those children usually three or more died due to complications from the family curse and usually only one or two a generation escaped it, Cassandra counted herself lucky to be the one in her generation to escape it completely.

Uncle Damian was not so lucky, like Aaron he had to be very careful. When Cassandra was a girl she had been hiding under a table when her mother and some of her friends were having tea and discussing Uncle Damian. Cassandra at the time hadn't understood the conversation but now she did.

Damian Yaxley had a reputation for perversity and not the run of the mill Death Eater brand of it either. Most of the rumors put him in the BDSM crowd. But unlike many of her family he didn't have a reputation for hating muggles. Cassandra had given her uncle a request that he keep an eye on certain people that ran with the

Death Eater crowd and offered him twenty five galleons a month to do so; plus the opportunity for bonuses if he brought her any particularly useful information. She had been surprised because she had expected questions, instead he had just given her a knowing look, smirked a little and agreed.

Severus Snape had spent two weeks debating the pros and cons of helping Harry Potter become an occlumens. One thing he was certain of, Albus wouldn't approve; especially since Potter was asking for an unbreakable vow of silence on anything that he saw while in Potter's mind. In the end the chance to curry favor with the world's next most powerful wizard proved too much temptation.

"Mr. Potter, a word after class if you please?"

"Yes, Professor."

After the class had filed out. Snape began, "I will teach you."

"When?"

"On the weekends two hours early in the morning, you are an early riser are you not?"

"Yes, sir. I'll let Neville know so he can be our bonder. I'll also send to the goblins for payment if you tell me how much that will be."

"Twenty galleons a month, just have the goblins transfer it into my vault will get you two hours of instruction a week. You said you've gone as far as you can in self-study, what did you mean by that?"

"I've read books about it, some auror left the books to me. I've meditated and I believe I have created an effective mindscape in which to hide my memories however. I have no idea if I can hold it under pressure and I have no idea how to do any of the more advanced techniques, I just know they exist."

"Good, my office seven a.m. Saturday."

"Yes, sir."

"Good, then head to your next class."

Harry nodded then left and hurried to Arithmancy.

Saturday morning arrived and Harry and Neville knocked on the professor's office door at one minute to seven.

"Enter."

They went in.

"Mr. Potter, Mr. Longbottom."

"Professor." Both boys chorused.

Neville pulled out his wand. "Let's get started. Take hands."

Harry and Professor Snape took hold of one another's hands.

"Will you, Professor Severus Snape, use your skills as a legilimens, to impart the skills of an occlumens to Harry James Potter to the maximum ability he is able to learn it or until he decides to cease your lessons?"

"I will."

"Will you keep completely private all information which you learn from his mind in the course of his education?"

"I will."

"Will you teach Harry James Potter occulmency to the best of your abilities?"

"I will."

The third tongue of flames wrapped the wrists of the man and the teen. Then faded from the visual spectrum. They released their hold.

Neville tucked his wand away.

"Thanks, Nev."

"No problem. Good luck with the lesson."

Neville left. Leaving Harry and Professor Snape looking at one another. Harry took a deep breath then reached up, and for the first time since the night he'd gotten it, removed the necklace and its amulet from his neck.

"What is that?" Professor Snape asked.

"An amulet my mother made for me, to protect my mind." Harry replied. "For this to work I cannot be wearing it."

"I see. Well, shall we start?"

Harry took a deep breath. Then for really the first time since coming to Hogwarts he let his eyes truly meet the eyes of one of his teachers.

For Severus Snape it was a bit of a shock. He had known Harry had green eyes, but until he saw the emerald orbs he had never realized that Harry had never truly met his eyes before. Seeing the vivid green he had only seen in Lily's eyes made his heart catch for a moment. "I will cast the spell and you need to push me away from your mind. Do you understand?"

Harry said, "Yes."

"Legillimens."

Snape was surprised by Harry's mindscape. He hadn't know what to expect but a representation of the Camden town marketplace on a busy Saturday wasn't something he would have ever expected. He probed lightly, he was sure the memories were here but they were so well camouflaged he was sure he couldn't find them, so from that standpoint Harry's mind was well defended. He could feel some slight pressure to leave but it wasn't enough to move him. He stayed in Harry's mind and probed a little more to see if he could find anything, but he didn't so he exited.

Harry was sweat soaked and shivering. He hadn't known what to expect but that was not it. He had felt the Potion Master's mind pressing on his but he hadn't been able to budge it. The pressure had made his head feel like it was trapped in a vise.

Severus looked at the boy in front of him. "As passive defense against legilimency that is probably the best mindscape I have ever seen. I would have no clue where to even start looking for a specific memory. However your ability to push me out is nonexistent, and all of it lacks any semblance of subtlety. It is obvious it is a defense; a good one I grant, but crude nonetheless. So, how do you wish to proceed, Mr. Potter?"

"Teach me how to push you out. But before you do that, what do you mean subtlety?"

"A subtle occlumens places neutral memories in the reach of the legillimens guiding his thoughts to certain conclusions rather than jarring him with a mindscape such as yours."

"Oh. I thought the goal was to keep your thoughts and memories from your adversary."

"Generally the answer is yes, but a jarring mindscape leads the attacking legillimens to understand he is being blocked rather than the occlumens leading him to believe there is nothing to find. I have found this later path to be a safer one to tread."

"I see. I will consider that. In the meantime how do I go about pushing someone out of my mind."

"You must isolate what is you from what is the intruder and will him or her out. That is the way in which your defense, as it is, works against you. In such a setting there are an abundance of anchors and hiding places for a legillimens. They may not find out anything but it also will be difficult for you to force them to leave. It is through your will and magic that you will force an intruder out. Ready to try again?"

Harry gave a reluctant nod.

"Legillimens."

An hour and a half later, Harry stumbled out of the office with a pounding headache. The Potion Master had taken pity on him and given him a headache elixir. Harry knew that the potion would knock him out for about two hours. So he hoped to catch Aaron before he

hit the library, to let everyone know he wouldn't be studying with them this morning.

Severus eyed the two inch light blue medallion Harry had accidentally left behind. He would return it to him in a while, but at the moment he couldn't resist the temptation of feeling Lily's magic once more. He reached out and lightly fingered the pendant. As his finger touched it he felt the slight pulse the pendent gave. It had obviously been keyed to Harry alone. The pulse however was just enough that he once again felt the tang of magic that was distinctly Lily. It wasn't a true scent but it reminded him of the perfume he had made for her every year from her twelfth birthday until their falling-out shortly after her sixteenth: citrus, bergamot and a faint dash of cinnamon. He blinked back tears. "I'm so sorry Lily. I'll do my best for your boy. He's like you, you know. I miss you."

Petunia smiled as she re-read the letter from her nephew. It was excellent that he had found someone like the Flamels to educate and advise him. Unfortunately he would only have two weeks this summer where he was actually available to visit with them. He and Dudley would be doing social dance camp at the studio most every weekday from eight until noon. She had spoken with Harry's kenpo instructor and Harry would likely be at the dojo three afternoons a week. Then he would be doing his magical studies at the Potter family apartment the other four afternoons; he would be his usual busy self.

She wondered briefly if the old geezer had made many moves to try and use Harry yet. She doubted it. Harry had a knack for keeping his actions behind the scenes. Part of her smirked, the day the old man tried to steer Harry would be amusing because she knew that Harry would take the knowledge he'd acquired and basically tell him to stick it. She just wished she could be there to see it.

Ragnok was steaming. He was glaring at the Unspeakable wearing the usual obscuring mask. "You want me to do what?"

"We wish to search the vaults of the inmates of Azkaban. There is reason to believe that an extremely dark object is in one of their vaults. If we find it we wish to use the object to trace others of its kind, and after that destroy it. It will never leave Gringotts' premises."

"We are obligated to protect that which is deposited."

"Even if the object in question doesn't belong to the person who placed it in the vault?"

Ragnok frowned heavily at the Unspeakable before him. "That is not the bank's concern."

"Look, You-Know-Who made the objects we're searching for. If one stays in the hands of his followers, they might be used to resurrect that murdering bastard. And that would be very bad for everyone. He'd be going around killing people, and people would hide in their homes, it would be bad for business."

"And if word got out that we let the Ministry enter the vaults of our depositors and destroy what we were entrusted with, that would also be very bad for business."

"Fine, let's cut to the chase shall we? What do you want in return for letting us do this?"

Ragnok couldn't help himself. He got a nasty grin on his face.

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